

Gellhorn, Martha

c. 1945-52

GELLHORN

Dear Marty, Bo^t 3755

I was deeply
disappointed not to
see you but I shall
count on a ~~real~~
real visit when you
return. I am so
glad you & your mother
are having such a
good holiday.

Your reporting does
a great deal of good.
So I'm glad of your
assignment.

Please give my

love to your mother
Much love to you

ORIGINAL RETIRED FOR PRESERVATION

Wellman

1945-46
Bx 3735

Dearest Mrs. R;

What a schamosale I got things into. Will you please forgive me? It seems to me I had you sending as many telegrams as if I were a congressman on the verge of voting for something, and then I got into such superb knots I couldn't get out. Please please forgive me; I'll never be such a nuisance again.

Are you taking some vacation this summer? I hope so. You know I always think it unfair for you to work steadily for everyone else in the world, and never look after yourself. And I remember the vacation you took with Tommy and the two gents near Miami and that you looked so well and rested and loved it. Is Tommy going to kidnap you? Please tell her I hope so.

Mother and I are off on a grand wild outing. We have her car which is seven years old, a small Plymouth. We both love it because it is like a steady old horse, and neither of us has any idea what goes on inside a car, what its hopes and fears might be. In this charming antique, we are driving to Mexico. Every once in a while we look at the Atlas and add up the mileage and having now discovered that it is farther than crossing the Atlantic we are very impressed. At the same time, we are not especially go-getting about driving, and have a tendency to settle down as soon as we see a nice place. This is ~~not~~^{sup} to happen every three days, for after three days at the wheel (and it's an enormous day if we do 500 miles) we feel we have already crossed the country in a covered wagon.

At present, we are taking up the squatters life at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and adoring it. There's a huge white sand beach, and a huge grey-to-blue sea and we found a hotel which seems to us divine, being clean comfortable quiet and cheap. So here we camp; I have been writing an article, Mother has been reading, in between times we walk along the beach collecting shells for grandchildren, attend the local movies, and gossip together. We have a portable travelling cocktail shaker, and every night sit cheerfully on Mother's bed and have our evening drinks, and launch forth to dinner giggling like a pair of Peter Arno charladies. It is a very good

life and I will be astounded if we get to Mexico before June. Mother, to the delight of her children, is at last taking a sabbatical year and high time too. She is going to be with me until late September and then with the brothers in Englewood and she is apparently enjoying it. I am the enemy of the consciences of you and Mother, because I think you have too much of same, and just because you are both the noblest animals the Lord ever created is no reason for you to carry the white man's burden all the time. None of this sounds new to you, does it?

In a moment of madness, I seem to have bitten off the most godawful assignment for next winter and I am already dreading it. I told Collier's I wanted to go from Finland to Greece — Poland, Czechs, Yugoslavia, as way stations — and report on how people really live behind what the press is pleased to call "the fringes of the iron curtain." As I am thoroughly and heartily sick of the idea that people necessarily eat babies just because they don't operate on a basis of free enterprise. Maybe they do eat babies, but I want to see it for myself before I'll believe it. And it occurred to me that all we ever hear is the solemn badinage of statesmen and I want to know what ordinary humans are saying and feeling, shop clerks and college professors and plumbers and truck drivers and farmers. Not that I believe such as they, the majority of the earth, control the policies that make war and peace. But for my own hope and sanity, I prefer to keep in touch with them, for on the whole I have found them good. It always beats me that there is such a difference between life and politics, and between people and those who represent them. On the other hand, the thought of plowing through snow up to my neck, all winter long, gives me the horrors; and also, unluckily, I never really believe that my reporting does the slightest good or informs or educates anyone. So in a way, I am not sure why I do this: there are easier ways to make the necessary money. However, there it is, and that's the next plan.

And I've got a novel, written once but badly, which has to be done over and finished this summer. This is the only work I really care about, so I'm delighted. I've been panic-stricken about it several times, and decided to abandon it, because

whereas men apparently have no nerves in writing about women (from Madame Bovary to Kitty Foyle), the reverse is rare, and I found myself launched on writing about men as if I were one. Suddenly I said to myself, come, come, you might as well admit you aren't; and then the panics set in. But Max Perkins, of Scribner's, who seems to have a sort of literary divining rod, tells me I better do it, that it's okay, and as the highest compliment "I wouldn't have thought a woman had written it." Now why that should please a female writer, I don't know: in a way, it shocks me that I am pleased, for it's so unrealistic. Perhaps it's because I've never lived in a proper woman's world, nor had a proper woman's life, and so — feeling myself personally to be floating uncertainly somewhere between the sexes — I opt for what seems to me the more interesting of the two. Or is that right? Women are just as interesting as men, often more so: but their lives seem to me either too hard, ^{with} an unendurable daily exhausting drab hardness, or too soft and whipped cream. The home, in short, does not look as jolly as the great wide world. Anyhow, I am going to try to get it the novel right, and if I don't there are always matches available wherever one is, and a manuscript burns very nicely.

I find that the story of my life fits nicely into two paragraphs and does not make absorbing reading. So will stop.

Darling, please take a rest, please have fun. Perhaps, in the fall, you'd get into a car and come off on a weekend with me. I was astounded by New Jersey, Penna., and Maryland, as we drove through them, with everything bursting into flower and the little towns so clean and sound and gentle; and I thought, if this is what they mean by the American Way of Life, they have something to talk about. (Then of course we hit the coastal part of the ~~Southern~~ Carolinas, a garbage country if there ever was one, and doubt set it.) But if you could spare the time, what fun to set out and find a pretty place for a couple of days. However, that sounds like a dream as I write it. Anyhow, will find you the moment we return and come and gratefully grab whatever minutes you can afford. I love you enormously as you know, and think you are an absolute blooming wonder, as you also know. Always,

Mar. 16

Warty

My present permanent address
is: 118 East Hamilton Ave
Englewood, New Jersey.

It's the house of a reliable
mail-forwarding brother, if there's
anything you want darling - perhaps
a Guadeloupe tin virgin or
saddle blankets? Love

m -

1241 - 33RD STREET, N. W.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

DECATUR 9140

Gellhorn
1945-1948

BA. 3755

Dearest Mrs. R; Thank you for your good letter. Don't bother to answer this one; I can't write you if it's going to take up your time making replies. Enclose herewith a couple of pages of rage; it made me feel better to write it though it's quite futile. Yes, I do want to come up the U.N. and will perhaps in a week or two and will call you and maybe we could meet for a few minutes. Much love as always. Don't let them work you to the bone.

Marty

JL

JK

Cry Shame !

by Martha Gellhorn

THE fierce lights of the newsreel cameras beat on a bald head and a pudgy, bewildered face, a photographer crouched four feet away; the press crowded at tables to the right; on the left sat the counsel and his aides; above, the four inquisitors lolled in reasonable and comfortable shadow. It looked like a cluttered stage set up there in front, but the rest of the big House Caucus Room was empty except for a few dozen people who seemed to have wandered in, casually, as one might into a Trans-Lux theater between trains. And it was quite a show, and free too: the Un-Americans putting on a flawless travesty of justice.

Robert E. Stripling, the permanent counsel for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, was the chief actor. Stripling, of the sharp voice and sick, spiteful face, did most of the talking because Hanns Eisler, the other leading character, was not allowed to cross-examine, or call witnesses, or even suggest witnesses, or read a statement; so naturally he did not have as much to say. For a while it was rather dull and then suddenly the word "communism" was pronounced. The four Un-Americans, sitting on their raised dais, woke up, moved, leaned forward. For now we had the clue, the thing the plot hung on, the horrid syllables that gave everyone his position and his fame and his power and his swelling sense of virtue. We had, in short, the delicious smell of blood.

Shame: The inquisition

AND Stripling made a point: 21 years ago Eisler had applied for membership in the German Communist Party. Eisler said he had not paid his dues (maybe he forgot or didn't have the money), nor gone to meetings (how boring a musician would find political gatherings with nothing to listen to but voices), and had, in effect, never been a "real member" of the party. Stripling clearly did not believe this; he would have no possible way of understanding the emotions and actions and spontaneities and carelessnesses of a man who loves music. Nor would Stripling know, or try to imagine, what Germany was like in 1926. Stripling was obviously enjoying himself with this dumpy, perspiring foreigner who speaks such accented English.

Stripling, like all the Un-Americans,

is a devoted and exclusive reader of the *Daily Worker*. (No other newspaper is seemingly credible enough to be cited in evidence.) He produced an antique prewar clipping from his favorite paper: a picture of Eisler being greeted by a band of people—students, musicians, or someone—all giving the clenched-fist salute, and Eisler affably giving it back. Eisler observed that really this was the salute of all kinds of European workers and always has been, but Stripling, impatient of such balderdash, told Eisler curtly to identify himself in the picture. Then Stripling said, show the committee what you were doing; and innocently Eisler raised his arm with the fist clenched. The cameras clicked like teeth snapping shut, there was a ripple of triumphant amusement in the Caucus Room, and Stripling turned away with a sly and satisfied smile. . . .

I had then seen as much of the show as I could stand, and I left. Besides, I had seen this show done before, but by real professionals; here in the Caucus Room it was after all a little peoples' court for beginners.

Shame: The gossipers

THE one legal accusation against Hanns Eisler is that, in 1940, he evaded the law which excludes from permanent entry into the United States such aliens as advocate, or belong to organizations which advocate, the overthrow of the United States Government by force or violence. This statute has been construed by the State Department and the Un-Americans to embrace Communists and the Communist Party. But no one has proved that Hanns Eisler was a Communist in 1940, or at any time subsequent to the wandering application for membership in the German Communist Party in 1926.

However, the committee apparently feels it can discern what goes on inside a man's heart, despite what the man may say to the contrary. To prove their divining-rod theory that Eisler has "communistic beliefs," they submit as sole evidence some flattering excerpts from the Communist press, the fact that Eisler has written "Red songs" (not titled by him; he is a musician only) which were sung by many anti-fascists as well as Communists, and the undeniable existence of his, shall we say, awkward brother. This

is all, this pitiful and ignorant gossiping.

When Eisler said he had never been a "real member" of the Communist Party, that is exactly what he meant. His technically false answer (that 1926 application for membership) will perhaps fix Eisler in the end. Yet those of us who are only human beings and not law-givers can understand this: that a person, driven by despair, hope or anger, makes a brief gesture, changes his mood, wanders off, forgets. And if the Un-Americans were realists, instead of a hunting pack, they would recognize that to be a "real member" of the Communist Party, you have to earn your C by Communist standards, which no one has ever denied are both long and tough and highly unsuited to men who are chiefly interested in sonatas, cantatas and the theory of counterpoint.

Shame: Court above law

HOWEVER, as Norman M. Littell, lawyer for George Messersmith, stated: if the committee thought Eisler was a Communist, the evidence should be turned over to the Justice Department for prosecution. For there are laws and courts of law, and an accused man has the right to a fair and free trial; at least as long as this country stands on rock. But the Un-Americans are not a law court, and do not have to prove anything. They can say what they like, armored with subpoenas and safe behind their extraterritoriality which spares them suits for slander. So it was possible for Stripling to announce that Eisler is the Karl Marx of the music world, a remark of such grotesque and childish silliness that anywhere else it would make people yawn or laugh their heads off. It was also possible for Representative John E. Rankin (D, Miss.) to say that testimony indicated that "Mr. Eisler certainly is following the Communist line and serving the Comintern just as effectively as if he were a member of the Communist Party." In the minds of the Un-Americans, We the People must be a bunch of fools or cowards, for we are seriously asked to shiver at the thought that Eisler's songs menace our way of life: on a note of music, apparently, the whole structure will topple to pieces. If We the People do not believe our nation and system of government to be more secure than

that, we ought to migrate like the lemmings, plunging solemnly into the sea.

Supposedly, an agent of the Comintern does something; he can't just sit around telling himself in a sinister fashion that he is an agent. But no one bothered to say, let alone prove, what Eisler, the alleged servant, has been doing in this country since 1940 to undermine us all. Eisler had visited Russia long before the war; the committee forgets that in the almost unimaginable past a lot of people went everywhere and it was not regarded as criminal. There even used to be, if you can believe it, plain commercial tours to the Soviet Union and anyone who had the fare could go, provided they wouldn't much rather have a bang-up time rollicking around Paris, France, and Rome, Italy, and other places which were also easy to reach. The committee says that Eisler was one who planned the International Music Bureau, apparently a dream on paper, which got its letterhead (and never went farther) in Moscow when Eisler was not there to consent or advise. But oddly enough, in those distant days before the war, music and books and painting flowed around quite freely between all except the fascist nations and this used to be considered a good thing.

Furthermore, as the committee neglects to note, we have only recently been at cold war with Russia; in the years between 1933 and 1939, a German anti-Nazi could conceivably have been grateful to the Russians for keeping him outspoken company in his hatred of Hitler. Since the committee's evidence seems principally to concern the period between 1929 and 1939, it is only proper to remind them of history.

Shame: The travesty

BUT this is beside the point: if Eisler broke a law, if Eisler is a servant of the Comintern masquerading as a sincere composer of music, these facts can be proved by established courts of law and handled by the fixed penalties of law. What is intolerable is the free and easy process of defamation, replacing the careful and weighty process of justice.

There was an extraordinary feature of this case, which seems to have passed unnoticed. The State Department had a dossier on Eisler, saying that Eisler was "communistic" but not a member of the party. Which leads one to brood, in sorrow of spirit, on the making of dossiers, and to ask

oneself whether intuitive and arbitrary deduction is adequate evidence for governmental bodies.

The Un-Americans, after three days of sordid and pointless baying over Eisler, decided to turn his case over to the Justice Department, and ultimately to a court of law, which is where it always belonged and the only place it belonged. If Eisler in fact did break the law, it must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt, and if proved he will stand the penalty, and that is exactly how it should be. But as it is now, the Un-Americans have terminated another of their travesties of justice; nothing is proved though anything is stated; and Eisler departs, free as air, and at liberty to be boycotted in his profession and starve at will. This is not the great terror which we watched during the long hateful years; this is not the secret arrest, the questioning with torture, the returned box of ashes. This is just a little terror, calculated to frighten little people. It works. Without recourse to law, a man can be well and truly destroyed.

Shame: The dingy ones

ONE asks oneself, finally, what these people wanted with Hanns Eisler. They proved nothing; they learned nothing. One can recognize the Un-Americans to be evil, but surely not half-witted; and they cannot expect

anyone to believe that Eisler, writing background music in Hollywood for a living, is at the head of some large furtive movement of music-lovers, vowed to plunge us all into communism. There is a limit to possible public gullibility. Of course, in pawing over Eisler, they had the joyful chance of trying to besmirch what is absolutely and finally unassailable: the character of Eleanor Roosevelt. And there was also the pleasure of being able subtly to scold and condescend to very important public figures. This must be a deep satisfaction, but it is amazing that the public figures do not rise, with dignity and good sense, to condemn these dingy tactics.

Still, none of this is enough, and one must

wonder whether there is a plan in this shabbiness, and whether Eisler, who is not himself important to them, has importance as a test of strength. For perhaps these men in the House Caucus Room are determined to spread silence: to frighten those voices which will shout no, and ask questions, defend the few, attack cruelty and proclaim the rights and dignity of man.

Shame: How they threaten

A MAN with a family will think many times before speaking his mind fearlessly and critically when there lies ahead the threat of an Un-Americans' investigation, a publicized branding, and his job gone. It is small consolation to know that you cannot be put in jail for your opinions if your opinions, freely expressed, end by starving your dependents. And if you can ruin a musician's livelihood, before a court has determined whether he is indeed a law-breaker or not, pretty soon you can ruin a painter and a teacher and a writer and a lawyer and an actor and a scientist; and presently you have made a silent place.

If these things should come to pass, America is going to look very strange to Americans and they will not be at home here, for the air will slowly become unbreathable to all forms of life except sheep.



The Brittonian Archives

SALEM, 1692: AN EARLIER AMERICAN WITCH HUNT