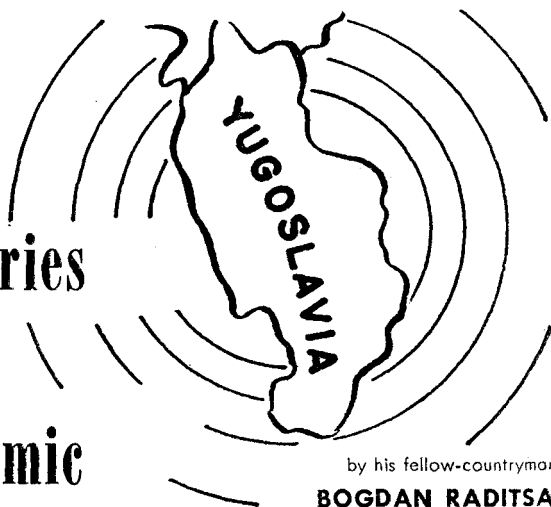


My Memories of Louis Adamic



by his fellow-countryman
BOGDAN RADITSA

*The strange life and death of a man who
could never quite become Americanized*

LOUIS ADAMIC, who single-handedly convinced many Americans of the existence of a country called Yugoslavia, is dead. His mysterious demise, however, is even more controversial a subject than was his exciting and agitated life.

The police say that he killed himself, although at first they seemed reluctant to make any pronouncement on the cause of death. But that will not end speculation, no more than the police verdict of suicide closed the Walter Krivitsky case in which the former Russian general was found dead in a Washington hotel room.

Some time before his death, after

undergoing a period of tortured indecision, Adamic reembraced Tito and his cause — this time against Stalin. But the publicity handouts of neither the Stalin Communists nor the Tito Communists throw much light on the case. Tito's camp limits itself to the not unshared guess that the Cominform did Adamic in, as Stalin's gunmen have eliminated so many others. The official Communists prefer publicly to approach the case by way of metaphysics. Adamic committed suicide they say, and they know why. His death was the objective result of the position he placed himself in when he abandoned "the cause of the

working class" and joined Tito. As such, he took the side of Truman, Chiang Kai-shek, Franco, Nazis, and everyone else the Stalinist metaphysicians do not like. His petty-bourgeois ideology had not prepared him for the crucial battles of the day. Naturally, he became depressed, isolated. For him, as for all enemies of Stalinist liberation, there was no way out. He took his life, another decadent bourgeois tendency. The future belongs to the men of steel.

People who knew Adamic well — and I was one of them — have reacted with almost unanimous skepticism to the suggestion that he killed himself. If there is such a thing as the "non-suicide" type, Adamic belonged to it. He was ambitious, money loving, fame-obsessed. He was selfish and egotistic; he had worked out an informal, everyday technique for using people to promote his books and ideas that was most impressive. Moreover, he had plans — and plans always mean the future.

He was writing a book. It was a large, detailed book, the book of a man who again has a Cause. It was ready to be published by a well-known house, and seemed certain to hit the bestseller lists. It would increase his fame, it would make him money, it would advance his Cause. It is most unlikely that such a man would kill himself at such a time — not before the reviews, so to speak.

So those who knew Adamic well will continue to doubt that he took his life.

TO THE YUGOSLAVS, Adamic was a writer to be admired or hated. One's political convictions dictated one's appraisal. But all Yugoslavs were in agreement that he was the most powerful journalistic voice their small country had in the "outside world."

To the Slavs in the United States, and other minority groups, Adamic was the author of the idea of the "nations' nation." He became the voice of eager-to-adjust immigrants when he declaimed the responsible idea that the United States was no longer a nation in which only those of Mayflower stock had a right to participation and leadership.

Unfortunately, however, Adamic was not content to rest with the Jeffersonian philosophy of tolerance and respect for all human beings. He "enriched" his philosophy with Marxist and Soviet ideas. He favored America integrating its newer citizens, but he also asserted that this could be done fully only under a Soviet system. During the war he saw Tito, through his Marxist glasses, as a new Lincoln or Jefferson in the Balkans. At a time when the peoples of the Balkans were genuinely desperate for Lincolns and Jeffersons, Adamic helped to bring to them a local Stalin.

He published a book in the war

years called *Two-Way Passage*. In it he expounded his belief that Americans of Slavic, German, and Italian descent should bring democracy from America back to the old countries. His book impressed Mrs. Roosevelt very much, and she introduced the author and his book to her husband.

It was largely by means of this book that Adamic became very widely accepted as *the* American — and later Soviet-American — expert on the Balkans. When Yugoslavia played a prominent part in the war, Adamic's pride in his origin waxed. He was now his old country's interpreter in the country to which he had gone. Many Americans relied on Adamic to keep them informed.

It was a role for which he was prepared. He came to this country at the age of fourteen. His parents were peasants. In the United States, he first worked as a newspaper loader for a Slovenian foreign language paper in New York. He served as a soldier in the first great war, and, when out of uniform, made his living as a textile worker and longshoreman. He experienced the great depression and wrote about it. He continued to hate those in his native land who were influential, the Catholic Church and the intelligentsia, neither of which has at any time found him to be an important writer.

In America people thought more of him. Here, the fact that he lacked

a solid European education, that he had never even attended high school, that he possessed an extremely superficial knowledge of European culture, literature, and history, was unimportant. I talked with him often in the Slovenian tongue; his knowledge of it was primitive, surprisingly poor. His knowledge of Yugoslav history was scanty and inaccurate. When he wrote on the subject, he often evinced ignorance of basic facts. His prose was alive and often brilliant, but those of his books dealing with Yugoslavia were never translated into Yugoslav — a fact unknown to almost all Americans — because no one would take them seriously. They were mostly the products of hasty journalism, readable and apparently informative.

His knowledge and understanding of Europe, old and new, was confused, limited, and biased. He had an instinctive taste for the worst elements of the Marxist analysis of European developments. Complexities, nuances, subtleties eluded his understanding. He was a typical

Bogdan Raditsa, ex-Yugoslav diplomat and ex-Tito aide, worked closely with Louis Adamic from 1940 to 1944 in behalf of their common fatherland. In 1945 he returned to Yugoslavia to head Tito's Foreign Press Department, found he did not like either Communism or the dictator, escaped to America at the end of 1946 to stay.

example of that South Eastern European *half-intelligentsia* whose only answer to the problems of the modern world was Communism or Fascism. His books on Yugoslavia, as we have said, were enjoyable, but they were rife with inanities, inaccuracies, and distorted "socialist" judgments. Given his intellectual base, it is not difficult to understand how he could have concluded *My Native Land* by asserting that the only way out for Yugoslavia was to become — together with all of Europe — a Russian-Communist colony.

In the United States, given his fashionable and impressive defects, he became a success. *The Native's Return* was a choice of the Book-of-the-Month Club. His articles were printed by the mass-circulation magazines. His Horatio Alger triumph was a spectacular example of what an immigrant can achieve in the United States. Millions of new Americans, who had benefited infinitely less in material ways, *loved* their new country. But Adamic was not very happy here. He had a place in the center of American intellectual life and handled the English language better than he did his old tongue. He was famous and earned much. But he was restless. Soviet Communism, he believed, was the only answer to his unease. America had been nice to him. But he did not feel American. And his tragedy was that he had also lost his European heritage.

THE SENSE OF inferiority he brought with him as a member of the small and persecuted Yugoslav nation was the heart of his personal tragedy. He hated the British, could not adjust here, and looked to the Russians. He observed the world with that neurotic sense of superiority that is a characteristic of the second-rate intellectual. Accepted as a Slav interpreter, he never gained that insight that comes easily even to the uneducated Slav immigrants who know quite simply that they arrived here penniless and far from happy, and that this country has given them a chance to achieve much, with even better prospects for their children, a notion that sophisticated American intellectuals have long derided but not eradicated from the minds of men who can testify to its truth. Adamic, one of the world's generation of sad little boys, looked on Moscow as a father, as a prophet, as a deliverer.

Such was the psychological world he lived in when I used to see him often. This was the belief that he brought into the United Committee of South Slav Americans which he helped establish to aid in propagating his dominating idea among Americans of Yugoslav descent. Such was the idea he wanted to insinuate into White House policy when he visited Roosevelt — and unexpectedly Churchill — on that famous evening which he described at book length in *Dinner at the*

White House. One result of this book was that Churchill sued him for libel and was awarded \$20,000 in damages. I know the story of that evening, and to me it illustrates the essential Adamic better than almost anything else.

On January 13, 1942, some hours before the famous White House dinner (with Mrs. Roosevelt in attendance as well as the President and Churchill), Adamic telephoned me at my apartment in Washington. I was then Chief of the Press Service in the Yugoslav Embassy. My wife answered and Adamic asked her whether he and Stella, his wife, could come to our apartment to change their clothes. Washington was terribly crowded, and no room was available in any hotel. My wife immediately invited them over.

A little before dark the Adamics arrived at our apartment on upper Sixteenth Street. They were very excited as they told us of the evening before them, and my wife and I shared their pleasure. That Adamic had been invited to the White House did not come as a surprise to me. I had been aware of Mrs. Roosevelt's keen interest in *Two-Way Passage*. Louis and Stella changed their clothes quickly, and there was time for conversation on the war and Yugoslav events. Stella was uninhibitedly gay. Louis, however, was, as usual, pensive and restless. His somewhat affected smile never left his face. I drove them to

Union Station (where they left their bags) and then to the White House. Louis promised to tell me soon about the evening.

Later in the evening Louis called again. His voice was charged with excitement. Their train did not leave until after midnight. Could they drop in on us again? They were anxious to talk to someone right away. He asked me to call a former Yugoslav military attache to whom he also wanted to tell the news.

When Adamic and his wife arrived, their eyes were shining. They had been very impressed by the evening. Mrs. Roosevelt had been especially charming. The President had been there, and they made us guess before they would consent to tell of Churchill's presence. It was surprising news; everyone in Washington had thought that Churchill had left several days before. Stella had been so worked-up that she had forgotten to eat. Now my wife cooked up some scrambled eggs for her.

ADAMIC TOLD ME and the military attache what he considered to be the most important news of the evening. He had urged the President and the Prime Minister to send help as soon as possible to General Mikhailovich, who was fighting against the Nazis in the Yugoslav mountains — unaided by the allies. Louis was a great admirer of Mikhailovich at the time and passionately favored

the sending of Allied personnel to Chetnick headquarters.

In reading *Dinner at the White House* I was not too astonished to learn that Louis and Stella had "changed evening clothes in the Union Depot's washrooms, where several other people were doing the same thing." The book went on to disclose that they had checked their suitcase and "sat in the crowded waiting room, glancing alternately at the afternoon papers and at the clock on the wall until it was time to go to the White House." I was not distressed to see my bedroom and washroom transformed into that of the Union Depot. Louis, you see — and it was the man — was dangling a detail before the "underdogs." It seemed to say: "You know, we are plain people, and we could find no other place to change our clothes in capitalistic Washington."

Nor did I mind having my car transformed into a taxi, the visits to my home omitted, but what shocked me is that although the book devotes more than half its length to a supposedly complete account of the conversation at dinner, it says nothing — not a word — about what must have been the essential issue raised. The book says nothing about Adamic's intervention with Roosevelt and Churchill in favor of Mikhailovich. On the contrary, Adamic gives the reader the impression that at the time he knew that Mikhailovich (who was killed by Tito)

was fated for a tragic end.

This is not a detail. By the time he wrote his book the Stalinists had made the name of Mikhailovich a synonym for infamy all over the world. Louis's politics therefore rearranged his memories. Had he reported his previous attitude, he could not have so easily white-washed the Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Communists who at that time were Stalin's puppets. Adamic, plumping for the Soviet cause in *Dinner at the White House*, wrote in that book: "The Mikhailovich legend was a hoax perpetrated by the Yugoslav government-in-exile." Had he not distorted his memory — had he printed the story as he told it to me right after the dinner — he would have had to add the name of Louis Adamic to the list of perpetrators of the "hoax." Aided by other pro-Soviet propagandists, Adamic's revised line on Mikhailovich became a common refrain in America — where it is now difficult for the Communists to win positive approval for the Soviets, but so often easy to influence many "liberals" to denounce Moscow's enemies.

Adamic's failure to mention his two visits to my home on his exciting evening is rather easily explained. When I returned to the United States in 1946, after severing all relations with Tito, I became — in Adamic's eyes — a traitor and a renegade. Contrary to the high idealism which Adamic so glibly ex-

pressed. he never really admired people who were willing to sacrifice opportunism for a more conscientious path. Men who joined Tito's Government after Yalta and who were not Communists were made to pay, and are paying, for their ideals. These men did not receive sympathy from dictator-loving Adamic, only contempt. Louis knew well that — with the exception of myself — all of those who helped Tito in London and Washington have ended their lives in Tito's prisons or in forced labor camps, or are surviving miserably. Yet Adamic never said a word publicly in defense of these people whose only folly was to help Tito — yet not be Communists.

Adamic's judgment of people stemmed from his creed, and when others did not share that creed or opposed it, he hated them. What Adamic's creed was can be learned from this passage from his *My Native Land*:

I see now that the salvation of the Yugoslav people and other small backward nations in that part of the world lies, clearly and inescapably, in the direction of Russia. They will have to overthrow their present racketeer rulers, form a Balkan or East European federation of collectivist national republics and in some mutually satisfactory way, attach themselves to the U.S.S.R.

Now I see why the Russian Revolution was necessary, from the

standpoint not only of backward, peasant Russia, but of the world at large.

His creed colored his suggestions and proposals which can be understood only in terms of that coloration. In *Dinner at the White House*, he developed his "two-way passage" idea and told how he and some friends wanted to create an "American Foreign Legion," composed of European-educated Americans of foreign birth who would act as the spearhead of the American Army to "further a democratic set-up" in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Italy. It is quite obvious what political complexion would dominate the foreign legionnaires who would be selected by Adamic and his Communist-front United Committee of South Slavic Americans.

ADAMIC'S INFLUENCE in the White House on Yugoslavian affairs was considerable. This can be seen from a previously unpublished letter that President Roosevelt sent Adamic shortly after the White House dinner. It was a reply to a letter that Adamic had sent the President.

March 3, 1942

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

My dear Mr. Adamic:

Your letter of February 3 has been very useful in the studies and discus-

sions which are in progress concerning eventual methods of military operations in enemy-occupied countries.

While the projects which might be worked out would by their nature be unsuitable for discussion in correspondence, I can assure you that the Government departments and agencies interested in work of this kind are giving serious examination to many factors such as those you mention. They are obliged of course to coordinate their discussions, since questions regarding foreign enlistments, finance, selective service classifications, etc., all enter into the matter, as well as considerations of general war strategy.

The information and suggestions contained in your interesting letter, concerning Yugoslavia and Greece in particular, will be most helpful in this work.

Very sincerely,

(signed) Franklin D. Roosevelt
Mr. Louis Adamic
Milford, New Jersey

This letter may help to explain why Louis Adamic was selected as one of the most influential associates of Mayor LaGuardia when, on March 31, 1943, the Associated Press reported that LaGuardia would "be commissioned a brigadier general to serve as an administrator in North Africa and perhaps in Italy after an invasion." The Yugoslav Communists, who at that time wanted Yugoslavia to be a part of the Soviet Union, received the news

with suspicion. Later they were overjoyed to find LaGuardia and Adamic among their most sincere and outspoken supporters.

The real Adamic could have been recognized when Tito was chosen by the Big Three as the man to be supported. Adamic campaigned for Mikhailovich almost until the very day when Moscow's line changed and, suddenly, Tito was given the mantle as Yugoslavia's man of destiny. The day on which the *Daily Worker* and the American Communist Party received orders to drop Mikhailovich and begin slandering him as a "traitor" to the Allied cause, on that same day Louis Adamic propagated that new line. He did not worry about the change. His only cause for concern was how most effectively to present the news in bourgeois American publications, and make it seem to make sense. Dropping Mikhailovich, he now did all he could to help prepare the way for the Communist conquest of Yugoslavia, the Balkans, and all Europe.

Adamic was in contact with the Yugoslav Communists from the time when he first visited Yugoslavia. In his *The Native's Return*, and in the *New Masses*, he had published reports on underground Communist activities in pre-war Yugoslavia. Among his friends were a number of Yugoslavia's leading Communists, the most prominent being Boris Kidric, Tito's present

economic chief. When he lacked information he was furnished it at Communist Party headquarters on Manhattan's Thirteenth Street or by Yugoslav Communists from Pittsburgh. Also useful was Tito's radio station, "Free Yugoslavia," whose headquarters were in Tiflis in the Soviet Union.

By the end of 1942 Adamic was the leading force in the organization of the United Committee of South Slav Americans, a front organization — in which the Communist Party, as we discovered later, was in real control. At that time he repeated again and again that Yugoslavia had to become part of the Soviet Union. "They want to go the Russian way and Russia-ward."

The American Communists of Yugoslav descent distributed Adamic's books everywhere as their most effective propaganda. His books were sold to immigrants who did not even know how to read them. He addressed meetings at which few understood the language in which he talked. But the fanatic Communists translated Adamic's thinking into such simply-understood slogans as this: "You are going, you Slavs, to lead the world! Not only in Europe, but even here in this country — thanks to Russia. The American Slavs will become the leading group, the new uppercrust." At the time Adamic wrote: "I believe that the Congress [of American Slovenians] should be deeply im-

pressed by the fact that Soviet Russia is the only great power so far which has officially and unequivocally expressed itself in favor of a united Slovenia . . ."

There came a day when I felt certain that Louis Adamic knew fully what Communism is and embraced it — not out of stumbling confusion but as a fanatic adherent. That was the afternoon in November 1944 before I left this country on my way back to Tito's Yugoslavia. Adamic, the great capitalist hater, was living at the St. Regis Hotel. He gave me his opinions at length, lying on his bed in an extremely comfortable room. I will reproduce the essence of what he said, since no one can remember exact language after so long a time.

You are going back to Yugoslavia, he said. I beg you not to be disillusioned with what you see at first. The Communists are tough people. They do not trust anyone. They have to be like that. They *cannot* trust anyone. They came to power against great odds. You will see things which you will not be easily able to accept morally. Do not moralize! In order to win the Communists cannot worry about morals. Has the bourgeoisie been moral toward them? The people who are in power in Yugoslavia are not sentimental and romantic. Idealism is a luxury to them. They have to be tough in order to remain in power because they had all the peo-

ple against them when they came to power. They know that they were accepted by the Western powers because of their strength. That is why you will have to reeducate yourself if you want to become one of them, or if you want to survive over there. What you have done so far cannot be considered as a serious contribution to their cause. You will have to give and prove yourself, more and more. Do not be afraid of blood. The Revolution has to be bloody, merciless and ruthless.

These were the sentiments Louis Adamic expressed to me on the eve of my passage back. In normal times I would have remained in the United States. But the desire to return to my native land proved stronger than the words of a man whom I considered not able to speak for my old country. When I went back, however, I recalled Adamic's words many times. He knew what kind of people the Communists were. In his mind, he was one of them.

ADAMIC WAS NOT a sentimentalist. To him history was a material development, in which the Communists were the most dynamic actors. History belonged to them. Their triumph was inevitable. His place was with them. The free ways of the Western democracies were a thing of the past. But his mission was in America where he had to help prepare the disintegration of democ-

racy. That is why he depicted the Communist conquest of Yugoslavia as a spontaneous and popular achievement. That is why he presented Tito as a Yugoslav Lincoln. To achieve his end, he published a personal publication called *Trends and Tides*. In its first "resistance number" (January-March 1948), he called for resistance against the United States. His publication, he said

spearheads a movement which must get under way in the U.S. during 1948 . . . a movement which must begin to *resist* by every moral, legal and political means, the artificially created hysteria now whirling toward World War III . . . *resist* the lie now astride the White House, the State Dept., the press and radio . . . *resist* the enormous distortion of facts and ideas involved in our relations with Russia, Yugoslavia, etc. . . . *resist* the un-American, fascist developments evident all over the U.S. . . . *resist* the militarization of America.

Then suddenly Tito was branded a traitor to the "democratic cause" by the higher church in Moscow. History, Adamic's great god of inevitability, now was strangling him, as it does sooner or later all men who think they own it. Louis had viewed the Yugoslav Communists as the vanguard of the great Soviet offensive against the West. He was pressed for an explanation; after all he was the widely accepted "inter-

preter" of his native land. In the leftwing New York *Star* on July 11, 1948, he furnished a short but significant explanation. Tito's rebellion against the Cominform was "a question of manners." Yugoslavs had too much of the individualist in them, and the Soviet Union "responsible for their country's security" had to accept the decision they arrived at. But whatever would happen, "in a Two-World situation, there is no doubt what side Yugoslavia is now on or what side she will remain on." Whatever happened, Yugoslavia was on the Soviet side. "Essentially," he wrote, "the crisis between the Cominform and the Yugoslavs is not political but one in human relations." Caught between two fires, Adamic thought that "both sides are more or less at fault" and that "from the angle of the Soviet orbit, it may be all to the good in the long run."

This was the attitude Adamic took with him to Yugoslavia, when he went for a visit. At first he sincerely wished to serve as a mediator between Stalin and Tito. Later, he altered his attitude more in Tito's favor. One can only guess at the vehemence of his opinions in his as yet unpublished book.

This much is clear. When the Tito-Stalin break occurred, Adamic did not like the development. He was shocked. The Yugoslav Communists, for their part, did not like his attitude. They had not liked

his dogmatic prediction in *My Native Land* that Yugoslavia would inevitably become a part of the Soviet Union. Playing a game of realpolitik the Communist Yugoslavian dictators preferred to let their ball be carried by conservative American writers of the Hamilton Fish Armstrong kind — as in his *Tito and Goliath* — rather than by doctrinaires like Louis Adamic.

Adamic could not overcome the brutal fact that Yugoslavia had been the first country to break out of the Soviet grip. He suffered when he saw Tito helped in America by those against whom he had opened a resistance crusade several days before Tito walked out of Stalin's empire. From personal sources, I am given to understand that confused Louis Adamic believed that Yugoslavia might regain its old position in the Soviet empire; he also played with the belief that Tito might outsmart both Washington and Moscow, and thus give Communism a mighty impetus in its hope of conquering the world.

Whatever Adamic thought in his tortured last period, he did not grasp the essential meaning of the present crisis: the Soviet Union does not want to and cannot help the Slavs fulfill their social, economic, national, and political aspirations. That is why the Slavs have hoped for much from America since the end of the war. The Soviet Union is not only not the Slav ideal — from

any standpoint, it cannot be.

In 1946, I told Louis Adamic — upon my return from Yugoslavia — that the Soviets were ultimately lost in Yugoslavia, that American prestige among the people was at its height. He labeled my view as reactionary. But there was no way to avoid recognizing the fact that the Soviet hegemony in Yugoslavia was doomed. The Communists could remain in power only by means of the most brutal force, or with the help of the West — the latter development having occurred since, with the former never absent in Tito's land.

Another failure of Adamic was his inability to see that the real revolution in East Europe can only be brought about by a flexible emulation of the American experience. The process by which many Slav immigrants have been made into happy and successful Americans was not Marxist. It was achieved because of the existence of American freedom. The fact that even he, Adamic, the professional dissident, could be a success, was proof of the vitality — if in some ways political immaturity — of the American way, which is not a slogan but a very real thing. In the contemporary world it is the face of the genuine revolution.

To Adamic it looked old, to Yugoslavs in the old country it is a vision of an almost utopian future.

Adamic's gravest failure was moral. He was determined not to recognize Communism — official or unofficial — for what it is, a brutal tyranny. Adamic, a little boy in a generation of outmoded, babbittish Left thinkers, preferred to enjoy his hatred of the wealthy and powerful, but had no relish for dwelling on the fact that the Soviet rulers have reached the acme of monstrous power. He was a semi-intellectual in the grip of an obsession.

We shall have to wait to see what he wrote in his last book. But whatever he wrote it is safe to say that he has not depicted the masses of his native land realistically. He has not told the American people that the overwhelming majority of Yugoslavs despise Communism, whether administered by an out-of-town gauleiter or a local boy making good at his country's expense.

Or is it possible that Adamic, the fanatic Communist, had begun to understand just how much the peoples of the world who want a better life innately hate Communism, and that whenever Communism has come to power it has succeeded because it has subjugated the people?

In Our Readers' Opinion

I think it's about time I expressed the feelings of a group of embattled farmers in Bucks County about your magazine. These feelings include my own. The MERCURY under your editorship is the only fearless, two-fisted American magazine in the nation. I had a double Bourbon after reading your last article about Truman. As you say, a calmly stated fact, during our current demoralizations, usually starts a riot. Start some more.

EMILE GAUVREAU
POINT PLEASANT, PENNSYLVANIA

Allow me to congratulate you for publishing the de Tolendano series on Communism. You are performing a distinct service to those Americans who wish to defeat the Party in an intelligent, non-hysterical fashion.

RICHARD D. ESPINOSA
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

YOUR AMERICAN MERCURY of May 1951, thank God, is the best ever published in these new United States. . . . This is to let you know your great book is appreciated by millions, but not so well by Truman and his followers.

A DEMOCRAT

In your August "Draughts of Old Bourbon" you make a few choice remarks about the "new barbarianism." At the same time you so ably demonstrate the fact that you are a living, breathing part of the "new barbarianism" that I couldn't resist the temptation to tell you so. . . .

MARY G. CREADY
GREENSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

I enjoyed reading: "Give a Man a Home, a Hilltop, and a High Ceiling." That is a fine piece of writing, and it conveys my feelings exactly.

R. BRYAN FLANARY
KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE