

An Interview with Granville Hicks: Part I

INTERVIEWER: You have, I take it, read Edmund Wilson's interview with Edmund Wilson in *The New Yorker* for June 2.

HICKS: I have, indeed. Otherwise it is quite unlikely that you would be here.

INTERVIEWER: Where, by the way, is here?

HICKS: I have given some thought to that problem. Mr. Wilson's self-interview was conducted in London, although he was at the time in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This raises all sorts of interesting possibilities, and for a time I wondered whether we might not hold our little meeting in some one of the restaurants I've never been able to afford; but then I decided that we might just as well settle down on my own front porch in Grafton. So here we are.

INTERVIEWER: It's much pleasanter than New York City.

HICKS: That's what I think.

INTERVIEWER: Do you believe that the self-interview is a form with a future?

HICKS: Why not? Samuel Butler once said something like this: "The great advantage of praising yourself is that you can lay it on so thick and in exactly the right places." The great advantage of interviewing yourself is that you can ask only the questions you are ready and willing to answer.

INTERVIEWER: Some people have called the Wilson piece self-indulgent.

HICKS: Oh, quite. But who has a better right to indulge himself?

INTERVIEWER: You admire Wilson?

HICKS: Greatly. If I remember correctly, Alfred Kazin said, some twenty years ago, that he would be interested in anything Wilson had written, even his laundry list. That goes a little far; and as a matter of fact Wilson did write one book that bored me—something I had not supposed to be possible. I refer to "Apologies to the Iroquois." His most recent book, "Patriotic Gore," is superb; there is no one else who could have done anything like it. That doesn't mean, of course, that I agree with everything he says.

INTERVIEWER: Good. I was going to get around to that. In the self-interview, for instance, he says that he finds the novels of C.P. Snow "almost completely unreadable."

HICKS: I know, and I just don't

understand what he is talking about. I started reading the "Strangers and Brothers" series before any part of it had been published in this country, and I have read each volume with unflinching pleasure. It's true that Snow isn't a great stylist and isn't much of an innovator. But unreadable? Nonsense! He quite deliberately adopted an old-fashioned way of writing novels because it served his purpose and suited his temperament, and he has made brilliant use of it. He has succeeded, as almost no other novelist in our day has done, in combining breadth and depth, in showing us what kind of world it is we live in and at the same time forcing us to look into ourselves. His kind of novel is not the only kind I like, but I am a pluralist so far as the novel is concerned.

INTERVIEWER: What about the Snow-Leavis controversy?

HICKS: I think it is perhaps the most fortunate thing that has ever happened to Snow—and he's been rather a lucky man, you know. It had been obvious to me for some time that a lot of anti-Snow sentiment was building up; you can't have the kind of success he has had without that happening. It isn't just jealousy, though there's plenty of that: petty complaints and disagreements bulk larger and larger as a man's reputation grows. "Oh, the man isn't that good," people say, and then they set out to get him. Well, Leavis's attempt to get Snow was so mean-spirited, so intemperate, so full of contradictions, so downright nasty that it created sympathy and deflated the anti-Snow sentiment.

INTERVIEWER: I noticed that most of the letters in the *Spectator* favored Snow.

HICKS: Speaking of that, I must say that many of the letters on both sides struck me as embarrassingly silly. As a friend of mine remarked, the whole business made me glad I was

not an Englishman. Snow, I am happy to note, kept his mouth shut.

INTERVIEWER: Leaving to one side the question of manners, what about the issues involved in the controversy?

HICKS: The best discussion of that subject I have seen is Lionel Trilling's article, "Science, Literature and Culture," in the June *Commentary*. Trilling deals sharply enough with Leavis's lecture, but then he analyzes carefully the weaknesses of Snow's position as stated in "The Two Cultures." After reading his piece, I reread "The Two Cultures," and I ended by agreeing in large measure with Trilling. Snow does not do justice to the literary tradition, and he examines the scientific tradition less critically than he should. I think that Snow himself may recognize that clarification is called for.

INTERVIEWER: Shall we leave Snow and talk about some of the other English writers Wilson mentions?

HICKS: By all means. I think he underestimates Anthony Powell, which is an easy thing to do because Powell writes so lightly and with so much charm. He is better on Durrell; but I wonder whether he's right in thinking that Durrell's preoccupation with disease and the torments of frustrated love is simply borrowed from Proust. I doubt it. I like what he says about Kingsley Amis, Evelyn Waugh, and Angus Wilson, though I don't fully share his admiration for "The Old Men at the Zoo."

INTERVIEWER: One does get the impression that the novel in England is in vigorous health.

HICKS: Oh, yes; and there's much more going on than he talks about. He doesn't mention Iris Murdoch, for instance, who is outrageous and outrageously talented; or Muriel Spark, or Doris Lessing, or William Golding, or Alan Sillitoe, or John Braine. And there are others, some quite young, who are worth watching. In the Thirties and Forties one had the impression that British fiction was lagging behind American, but that isn't true now.

INTERVIEWER: What about the American writers Wilson mentions?

HICKS: Let's postpone that topic for a while—for a week, say. And now shall we have a drink and admire the scenery?

INTERVIEWER: Gladly.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.



NEW MEN IN NEW WORLDS

*"... a simplicity of doing
and being and giving from
which great enterprises spring."*

By ADLAI E. STEVENSON, U.S.
Ambassador to the United Nations.

"HOW BEAUTIFUL is our earth!" exclaimed Major Garin as he came down from space.

"Man, that view is tremendous!" shouted Colonel Glenn, looking at the same view.

These two men have more in common than either has with the ideologists of conquest. This is not just Pollyanna talk. Wars start in the blind, angry hearts of men. But it is hard to hate those who toil and hope and discover beside you in a common human venture. The Glenns of our world could be new men in a quite new sense—the new men who, having seen our little planet in a wholly new perspective, will be ready to accept as a profound spiritual insight the unity of mankind.

When I had the good fortune to conduct the astronauts and their families around the United Nations, and to witness the thunderous spontaneous welcome that roared from room to room among all the nations, I had a sense that men such as these belong to a new fellowship which could one day be a great strand in the web of peace. And I believe they felt the same. Colonel Glenn said, I recall:

"As space science and space technology grow . . . and become more ambitious, we shall be relying more and more on international team work. . . . We have an infinite amount to learn both from nature and from each other. We devoutly hope that we will be able to learn together and work together in peace."

These are the words of our "new men"—not a narrow arrogance, but a generous vision of the great human family. Let no obstacles, however forbidding, ever blind us to that vision.

This same spirit must animate us in

other realms. I am deeply convinced that the tranquillity of the human family in the next three or four decades depends upon bridging the great and growing gap between the wealthy, industrialized northern hemisphere and the underdeveloped, poverty-ridden south.

After a decade of fairly sustained effort, we are beginning to learn that to move out of the cramped, ignorant, pretechnological conditions of a static tribal or feudal society is fully as difficult as breaking the bounds of space.

All the forces of tradition, all the gravity of ancient habits hold the nations back. Each national "capsule," small or large, has to find its own idiosyncratic way into orbit, and a lot of them are still on the ground.

The process of modernizing nations involves an exceptionally complicated and difficult set of interlocking actions, decisions, and discoveries. There will therefore be delays and disappointments.

Some projects, like some rockets, will explode in midair. Some will take paths that were not in the plans. Yet failure is often the prelude to success.

In the matter of international assistance, we can say without doubt that we know more than we did. Our techniques are wiser, our sense of what we have to do more sure. Some underdeveloped areas — one thinks of parts of India and parts of West Africa — are beginning to show unmistakable signs of momentum. This is no time to write the program off as a costly failure. We are learning by doing, and results are already beginning to show.

To those who have observed the U.N. for many years, let me say, also, that the peculiar merits of multilateral aid programs under U.N. auspices are being recognized more widely than ever. This is especially true in the new nations of Africa. I am told that the delegates to the recent meetings of

the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa, in Addis Ababa, were unanimous and emphatic in their desire to see the U.N. become a major partner in their development program.

None of this can be done quickly. Changing an economy means in fact changing a whole generation of men. I doubt if that can be done in less than two decades. So I would say: Look on the fateful program of modernizing what the French call the "third world" — the world of the poor and dispossessed — as on the program for probing the planets. Expect failures. Rejoice in successes. Never doubt the job can be done. Indeed it must be done if misery is not to turn to despair, despair to wars, and war to ruin for us all.

But it must also be done because of a much profounder reason: for it is wrong to leave children to starve who could eat with our help, wrong to let youngsters die when medical skill can save them, wrong to leave men and women without shelter, wrong to accept for others, in the midst of our own abundance, the iron pains of degrading want.

IN a slack age, we can still be moved by the prospect of discipline and dedication, qualities evidenced by the astronauts. We can still recognize and acclaim a simplicity of doing and being and giving from which great enterprises spring.

Perhaps there is salvation in the new image of the immense patience and discipline and stripping down of desires necessary in the lives of those who are fit enough to venture into the new dimension of outer space. Here we can perhaps glimpse some reflection of the kind of discipline and restraint which we all need in some measure if our generation is to achieve great tasks, not only in the upper air but here and now in this bewildered and floundering world.