

Aug. 28

Dear Dr. Zeligs :

I was horrified yesterday morning, when my wife returned from New York to Cape Cod where we have been staying for the month, to find both your last letter to me and one page of an answer to you that I had written July 31 and never mailed , in the crash of getting my family packed and away in a blistering heat wave.

In that letter I was recounting what had become of my search for the Chamber's extracts. Since my father's death my mother has reorganized her house. Both my papers, dating back to college and those of my father, were taken from my old room when I still lived with my family and my father's office and lumped together under the heading Papers. Since my father was one of the most prolific free lance magazine and political writers of his time the Papers number what should be measured not in pages but tons. An incidental factor to my search through them is that there has been some pressure from a publisher to attempt a posthumous biography of my father so I didn't just glance through them rapidly, as I might otherwise, have done.

The fact then is that I have failed to find the extracts. This doesn't preclude the fact that they still remain. I rather suspect now that my mother, fearful of them, for reasons I believe I explained to you, destroyed them, although she maintains otherwise.

During this time I have had a chance to think more about them. At times, so bizarre is the situation, I forget entirely about the incident and am somewhat surprised to recall it indeed happened. The papers, it occurs to me, of course could not be used by you directly. In the extracts I made there was nothing of any "news" value, no new names kept out etc. Chiefly, I suspect, the extracts would be of some value to reinforce any belief that this man was more of an out and out hysteric with a staggering persecution complex.. things I'm certain you have had. little trouble deducing.

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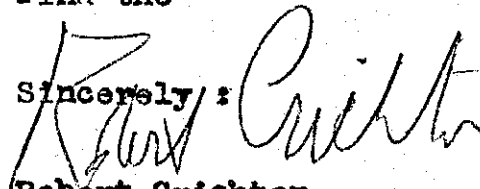
I return to New York Sept. 4 and will go back to Newtown, Conn. within the week. At that time I will give another search for both our curiosities. I am very sorry about this unanswered letter. I 'm also sorry not to have the papers in hand. Unless you have not seen any of these ravings the extracts probably are not as valuable as I would first I have believed, however.

I wonder if you have contacted the editors of S and S who worked on the book. I think the name of the Doubleday editor who turned down the original diary as unprintable as Ken McCormick although I am not certain about that. They might very well have some very trenchant things to report. McCormick used to be a real free wheeler but he has now gotten status as senior editor and has become pretty much the careful organization man. However they could see little enough in the original papers that made sense to risk publishing the diary.. and Doubleday will publish the biography of a bat boy if it is legible.

What cleansing job took place before Witness appeared might make a revealing side picture of American publishing.. especially in the hinsight department .. applying Ajax , the whitening miracle, to the past.

I will in any case make another effort to find the papers.

Sincerely :

  
Robert Crichton  
Corn Hill  
Truro, Mass.

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Sept. 13

Dear Dr. Zeligs :

A note in response to a question I discover, on re-reading your letters, you have asked several times.

I am almost positive now that the date on which I received the Chambers manuscript was late in Feb. or early in March of 1950.

The mas. was not really a manuscript in the general term but a disjointed log, part diary, part reflections, thoughts. As I recall it was in very poor shape physically, inked out, scatched out, xxxed out and plain shabby and dirty, as if it had been carried about in a burlap bag for numbers of years, which it well might have been. He out things in funny places. This weekend I return to Conn. and resume my search. I am getting quite interested to find the extracts myself and they begin bit by bit to challenge my memory. I will let you know if my hunt is or if it isn't succesful. Meanwhile I would look forward to meeting with you when you get east this autumn. I'm in the Manhattan phone book, both home and office.

  
Bob Crichton

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Oct. 16 (1963)

Dear Dr. Zeligs :

I wrote this long because in a way I wanted it really to be for my own sake a kind of self-analysis. As I wrote it all kinds of things I had forgotten came back and for the sake of whatever it could possibly be worth I put it down ...as much to set the scene as anything else.

I don't think I stated it quite hard enough when I put down my feeling about Cambers...that I wasn't sure that he was right or wrong but the feeling that this man was a real nut. That I knew he was neurotic as he himself was willing to reveal but not really crazy as a loon, to use the vernacular.

I'm sorry I didn't at once offer to meet with you or invite you home. I gathered you were having dinner tomorrow night and tonight I was going to theatre with other people and would have had a hard time breaking this date. I suspect on such a short visit you will have plenty to cram in all at once. I guess all this writing here can tell you about all that I possess. You are entitled to use any of it that you might wish to use.

My very best wishes and call if there are questions or we can get together:

  
Bob Crichton

Talk about a nut, by the way. The last House investigator to come to the house.. one Jefferson Jones, no less.. we drove 80 miles back to NY to his suite at the Waldorf to charm him. As we went he would point to various apts. in NY and say " See that house there. Abe Burrows lives there. I'm going to have to close his show ( Guys and Dolls ) next week. Sad, isn't it? " What kind of complex do you think he had?

To : Dr. Meyer Zeligs, concerning the Chambers papers

" THE CHAMBERS PAPERS "

In the winter of 1950, most probably in late February or early March, through a peculiar coincidence, I came in possession of the personal log or papers or diary-journal - [I don't know what describes it best] - of Whittaker Chambers. At that time I had had an outline for a book going the round of publishers. My father, Kyle Crichton, also had the manuscript for a book in a publisher's hands. In error, instead of either returning my manuscript or that of my father [-I was still living with my family on a farm in Newtown, Conn. then] - a bulky manuscript from Doubleday was left in in our mailbox. Before even bringing the package back to the house from the road I opened it and was stunned to see the personal papers of Chambers. At this time, if I am correct, the second trial was on or just over. The name of Whittaker Chambers was impressive to say the least.

To complicate matters, however, my father, Kyle, had been a prominent left winger in the thirties. Under the name of Robert Forsythe he had contributed scores of biting, satirical scathing weekly articles for The New Masses. Under his own name he had been a well known, prolific editor of Collier's magazine. The House Un-American activities committee had even then several times questioned my father. The FBI had questioned him on numerous occasions and both continued to do so. It will seem fantastic now, perhaps, but a person in Newtown for example had reported to the FBI that there was a cache of Russian gold in our cellar or attic and several rather shamefaced agents had had to come out from New Haven and search our house from top to bottom for the "gold".

For the personal papers of Whittaker Chambers to fall into my father's hands seemed almost to be some kind of trick. Let us recall of the mysterious use of such foils and ploys as papers in dumb waiter shafts, in pumpkins and now in the hands of one of the keenest satirists the left wing ever turned out. I had no doubt that a rather glum, dour type as Chambers appeared to me to be wouldn't have learned to hate a wit like my father. Through all of this, moreover, my mother, a devout Roman Catholic always in opposition to Kyle's political and social beliefs, had become terribly upset

by these visits of investigating agents, as well she might. She was, I recall it so well with a good deal of wry humor, constantly trying to get my father to reduce the size of his Russian library - a vast conglomeration, quite catholic in taste, which contained everything from the account the Russian trials to Eugene Lyons and the great volumes of Trotsky - to no avail. When the FBI agents arrived they were dutifully ushered into the room containing the books and if they noted this they never showed any sign that they did.

I decided right then that I would not tell either my father or mother about the Chamber's papers, at least right then. I stuffed them back into the mailbox for the moment, possibly stealing a dramatic leaf from Chamber's own book of techniques. But imagine me standing on a country road with these private notes in my hand. I could quite easily see my father reading through them ( it would have been irresistible to anyone who could read ) and then having some agent arrive, claim the mss. and begin a public grilling with the fact of my father actually reading these private papers. I was quite naive, perhaps, but I could see my father getting a public shellacking he might never recover from.

When my family was at lunch, perhaps, I went back out and got the papers since I was afraid to leave them out all day. To be returned they would have to be re-wrapped. I snuck them up to my room and hid them in a closet. That night, I suppose at about bedtime, I took them out of the closet with, naturally, the firm intention to wrap them up and send them right back where they came from. If anyone came I wanted them sealed. But I'm a writer, too, and a noted snoop and before I could ever get string around the papers I began to read.

What I read, as I recall, was ridiculous, absurd, incredible, frightening, sad, disillusioning, weird.

The pages to begin with were, for the most part, typed with much writing in, scratching out, underlining. I might well be wrong about this but the pages seemed to me of the kind that come from a bound notebook which can be taken out by applying pressure on the back of the book. The pages were old and grimy and dirty and stained. The papers had evidently been around.

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\* Two pages which are?

Let me make several points plain. At the time I was 25 and had just gotten out of college having lost three years time in the war. I was quite naive in many ways. I was not sure about the Chambers-Hiss case. I didn't like the way Hiss defended himself but I suppose that I was certainly predisposed to favor his story. One reason for this was that I didn't like the idea being used in the second trial of ~~bringing~~ bringing in as witness a man who you admit lied about this and this and this but did tell the truth about this. With leftwingers, however, I was quite capable for the fun of argument to take Chamber's side and present a good case.

What I read, however, amazed me. Against my better judgement, because as the night drew on I still had visions of the knock on the door and the request for the manuscript, I began copying extracts from here and there. They had no sequence and I don't think anything I copied had any real political or news value in the sense of shedding new light on Chambers revelations. I copied them because they were so exaggerated, so obviously lunatic. It is a failing in me that I am known as a person with a low tolerance for psychoanalytical argument, understanding or insight. I am not really interested in exaggerated mentalities. They all seem pretty much the same. I am more interested in the problems of sane people. But I copied extracts, finally, because they revealed to me to show a Chambers so far gone beyond the line of being able to see reality that it made me incredulous. I recall very well thinking at the time that the next time the eternal Hiss-Chambers debate came up that I would whip out one of these quotes and ask a person to give me an honest appraisal of the mind, of the reliability of a person who could write such a page or paragraph. I would then, of course, clinch the case by announcing that this page of paranoid ( ? ) ramblings, wretched with self-pity, sinking with self-abomination, self-disgust and then whirling about with such ridiculous charges against people and situations - what even I could see as a persecution complex mounted to a pretty high degree - that I finally was simply bored by the whole thing.

I remember feeling that this ended my real interest in the thing because the man was simply some kind of nut. With a madman throwing out charges something might hit or stick and even be right but the man doing it was so obviously desperately in need of some kind of mental treatment that to credit him was a very dangerous bit of business.

I read through the pages all that night. For a time I made notes in longhand in a notebook having no idea of what I might do with them. Because of the position of my father I knew in fact that I wouldn't do anything with them. It didn't occur to me that I couldn't do anything with them, that they were a man's private property. I think I just felt rather incredulous that night reading this famous man's intimate words. When my hand got tired I finally typed a bunch of notes, making copies of certain pages and passages that seemed especially incredible. I wasn't worried about my family then as I often typed at night. I would simply tell them I had a good story and was "inspired". I was, in a way.]

*too late* \* [ Dr. Zeligs has asked me to recount if I could the tone of some of the writings. This I wouldn't dare attempt. The style of ~~Robert~~ Chambers is at once apparant it seems to me, even to the untutred. <sup>H</sup> He has a remarkable ear for those dark, heavy, brooding words, those ominous, tortured groaning kind of words, a certain old-fashioned, dark-velvet doom <sup>rose</sup> that reminds me of Edgar Allan Poe crossed with some elaborate Russian novelist. Everything was written as if composed on an organ, ponderous, muted, charged, highly dramatic dropping into gloominess. He really reminds me of a Dostoevskian hero as imagined by Dickens; dangerous but ridiculous.

In any case I copied the notes because I simply felt it might be important to show someday that the man was perhaps more deeply disturbed than was apparant. I ~~made~~ made about 35 or 40 pages of ~~transcriptions~~ transcriptions. The next morning, looking like a Dostoevskian figure myself, I'm sure, I took the papers out of the house under my overcoat and mailed them back at once to Doubleday. I think I was crafty enough not to include a note but I'm not sure. I probably wrote something like " We got these papers by mistake and didn't read them. Honestly. "

A couple of years later the House Un-American committee sent an investigator out to Newtown for a closed session. Before he came my mother spent several days going around the house ridding the place of anything that smacked of being less than approved by Sen. Taft, junking copies of the New Republic and even Commonweal. I was not at home then. I came up to be with the family on the day of the investigation. I wondered about those papers being in the house, myself, but

said nothing about them. I never had said a word about them. Later when I searched my closet for them, however, they were gone. It is my belief that my mother, inspired by the best intentions and motives, did away with them in some pumpkin of her own called an incinerator. I have made a dilligent search through all of my father's effects- he died three years ago - but have never found them since.

If I were forced to title those papers and publish them I think something like THE DIARY OF A MADMAN - The Ups and Downs of a Tormented Soul , or a LEXICON OF LUNANCY etc etc. would have been more like it.

Certain background sections of Chamber's life which I recall appear in Witness have been very nicely cleaned up, brightened up and given the face of sanity. Had the details been put down in the way I recall them from the papers, right or wrong, the man would have been laughed out contention. To have published those papers without extensive hindsight, editing, polishing, second-chancing would have certainly been of no service to Chambers or his cause. I don't know- didn't sections from these papers appear in Life or The Post. Somewhere I recall reading extracts from Chamber's diary mainly because I recall the feeling of seeing at once that these ~~bits~~ were the new, slicked up, presentable version of something troubling. And then myself feeling that I couldn't now say anything about the true diary for my family's sake but even more so that no one would believe me anyway. I hadn't had the foresight to arm myself with one of these little micrfilm cameras that would have come in so handy and preserved the true Chambers notes for all someday to see.. as well they still might I suppose.

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Witness

March 21, 1969

Robert Crichton  
c/o Simon and Schuster  
630 5th Avenue  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Crichton:

I am addressing this letter to you in connection with a book on Whittaker Chambers that I am writing under contract to Simon and Schuster.

I am fascinated by the account given at page 418 of Friendship and Fratricide of your inadvertently having in 1950 been sent a manuscript that Chambers had submitted to Doubleday. Is the account given in Dr. Zeligs' book essentially accurate? Or is there anything at all in his account that you might want to modify, correct, or amplify on?

Earlier this week I interviewed David McDowell, who was the editor at Random House on Witness and who told me that he didn't see, on the basis of what he said was his own knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the publication of Chambers' autobiography, how Dr. Zeligs' account of your inadvertent receipt of some portion of Chambers' manuscript could possibly be accurate.

In view of such a comment (and McDowell, as you probably are aware, could never possibly be categorized as a shining liberal), is there anything further (either for or without attribution) that you would be willing to say on this subject?

For anything at all that you can tell me, I assure you I shall be most grateful.

Very sincerely yours,

William A. Reuben

WAR:cd

March 25

Dear Mr. Reuben :

You will find it rather odd to learn that I have never opened Zelig's book to read what it was he said I said to him.

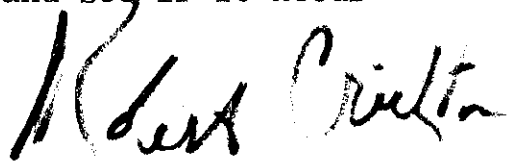
I got to dislike the man and when his book came out, which he sent to me, I just couldn't open it. The reviews were about as bad as I suspected they would be.

I see that now I will just have to open the book and see if I have anything to add to what Zeligs says or take away from it. I suspect I will want to say something because it was the nature of Zeligs as reporter to tend to only hear what he wanted to hear. That's why I was sorry I ever opened the can of worms .

I never saw any part of the manuscript of Witness. What I was sent was Chambers's diaries that later were fashioned into Witness. Or at least served Chambers as a guide for what became Witness. It never occurred to me before that some editor such as McDowell might never have seen the original diaries but only a first draft by Chambers from the diaries. As I told Zeligs the diaries were sent to me in Newtown, Conn. by mistake from Doubleday where Ken McCormick was the editor. As far as I know all McCormick has ever had to say was that he didn't think the diaries, so disorganized and confused, would be able to be made into a coherent, good book. I never read Witness myself but McCormick was obviously wrong . I have looked enough into Witness to know however that someone made some mighty changes from what was in the diaries. I made extracts totalling over 20 and almost 30 pages the night I had the diaries to show the world the chaotic state of Chambers mind and then never knew what to do with them. My father , an ex-semi Communist who used to write biting satires on American life ( including the Reds - he always said if they won he would be the first shot ) under the name of Robert Forsythe for the New Masses, was then being questioned off and on by the HUAC. Our house was searched several times by the FBI because the New Haven office was told by some crank ( who we used to invite for cocktails and dinner and who now, wouldn't you know it, has retired to So. Cal. ) that we had hoards of Russian gold. They, the agents, used to get pretty embarrassed but search away they did. My mother, in terror that they should find the Chambers extracts, burned

them although to this day she denies this and denies ever having seen or heard of the papers. In the hectic state of the times I was sure, when I opened the package from Doubleday, that it was a plant and that the house would soon be surrounded and we would be caught in illegal possession of state papers or some such thing. When nothing happened about midnight I crawled under the covers in my ice cold room like a kid reading forbidden books and read through the night, acting very much like Chambers himself, would act. The whole incident is just about as looney as most things that seemed to happen to this extraordinary man. At the time I was committed to thinking Hiss was innocent although I found it awfully hard to swallow that business of crossing the room and looking at the teeth and announcing that he knew a George Crosley or some such.

I will look up the Zelig's account and see if it needs re-stating.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert Coates".

It still ranks as one of the most intriguing cases anywhere and can occupy an entire evening around the table after dinner. I have always felt that there was indeed something there between the two that had Hiss been able to own up to would not have been very serious and which, in the denying, made the case blossom all out of proportion. Given a man of Chamber's fantastic qualities, it didn't take much blooming either. A lot of people today seem to be harping on the Dostoevskian aspects of homosexuality, latent or not, and the classically divergent social backgrounds of the two. It is just possible for example that someone like Chambers would actually have known ~~xxx~~ a Lee Harvey Oswald in his Gorki travels ( and also understood him ) where Hiss never would have known him or understood him.

March 25

Dear Mr. Rauben :

I have just looked at the extract from Helig's book. What he puts down is right for the most part. I see the problem that results from the wording, however.

What I saw wasn't a manuscript but an enormous pile of notes arranged in a rough chronological fashion and as such referred to by me as a diary. But it also wasn't in strictest sense a diary. All I have ever been able to assume was that this was indeed the basis for Witness. As I mention in my first letter, it is possible David McDowell never saw all this material.

But then what did he buy etc. that resulted in Witness? It is quite possible that after the Doubleday rejection Chambers took these very dissarayd notes and whipped up a more organized, coherent outline for a book and this is what McDowell worked from.

What bothers me is the silence from Doubleday. Perhaps Ken McCormick was the only person there to read what I read. Why did McCormick turn the book down? With the incredible public interest in the case almost anything would be printed, especially by a house like Doubleday who have never been known to shy away from a book merely because it lacked literary merit. To me the only answer can be that it must have been as big a mess as the pages I saw, so bad, so disorganized that even a hardened editor like McCormick saw no hopes for it ( and, presumably, Chambers.

An important element to this story involves time. The more I think back the more certain I am that I got these notes while the second trial was underway. What amazed me was that Chambers would think that a book could be brought out before the case was resolved. I speculate that he was pretty strapped for money. There is also the chance that Hiss would be found not guilty and Chambers' one chance for monetary success would go down the drain and he wanted to get someone committed to a book before that happened. The reason for this recollection on my part is my remembrance of the day the second trial ended. I was in Bethel, Conn when the papers were delivered with

the banner headlines that Hiss was guilty of perjury. I bought a copy and went into a bar by the railroad station to read it slowly over a beer. The bartender and some of his loyal patrons spotted the headline and talked about the case in the manner of so many small time , small town patriots who ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ exercise the largest part of their patriotism by playing the illegal slot machine in the back of the American Legion club.

" They oughta take that bastard and line him up against the wall etc etc

I recall clearly saying " listen, I could tell you some things about the other guy... " and then deciding to simply shut up.

The chief thing about the notes was the fantasy that the Communists were coming to get him. He would be in his farmhouse and see them, as dusk fell, ringing the edge of the woods and positioning themselves somewhere out there in the dark waiting for him to make some false move. He would barricade himself and family in the house, gun at the ready ( both pistol and rifle I think ) and prepare for the long night seige. I guess he honestly felt that if he went out in the night they would get him. The next entry would be that he went down to Baltimore to see so and so about getting a job. At dawn these murderers always seemed to melt away. It seemed to me to be a kind of classic statement of the persecution complex or certainly of a simple paranoia. From the reading and the notes I took there was simply no escaping the fact that he was suffering various forms of delusions. He also seemed to have a pretty heightened idea of the effect his leaving the party was having in the US Communist party circles and in Russia. I don't recall doubting much of the straight information in the notes but the conclusions drawn from it - the results of any acts were over-dramatized, out of proportion, thus verging on delusion and fantasy. The writing was not often distinguished and I recall thinking , in going through Witness, that Chambers or someone had done an excellent editing or re-urbishing, Chambers himself or Chambers with an editor. Not that Chambers didn't have a good style; it didn't seem to be apparant in these notes.

I have often wondered whatever happened to that package of notes. I mailed them back to Doubleday, like Chambers would, just about when the sun came up. I didn't want them around. I also think I enclosed a letter to Ken McCormick relating that I had indeed opened the package , mentioning that I couldn't resist reading a few pages and that I was returning it as fast as I possibly could. He doesn't recall any part of it as I have brought it up once or twice with him as ~~parties~~ parties.

*Ken McCormick*

WAR interview

3/28/69

Crickton:

My mother a devout Roman Catholic,  
we <sup>of</sup> to New Haven & pleaded with  
them <sup>[FBI]</sup> to stop killing her husband. (Three  
times they had searched the house.)

~~1~~ <sup>father's</sup> <sup>successful</sup>  
MON - his brothers all <sup>business</sup> men in Penn coal  
area - they put pressure on Walter (the <sup>chief</sup> of  
the AAC) to stop bugging Kyle Crickton -

now is ~~working on short stories~~  
pending the start of a new  
novel.

Late in the autumn, Random House will bring out a book called "Cold Friday," its contents selected from the diaries and papers of the late Whitaker Chambers, the writer who best was known for his part in the Alger Hiss case. Norton Taylor of the staff of Fortune magazine has been the editor, the book being autobiographical and containing Mr. Chambers's reflections and philosophy. The book was culled from a great many cartons of papers stored on Mr. Chambers's farm in Maryland, and the somewhat unusual title represents the name of one of the fields on the farm. A picture on the dust jacket will show the field.

Richard Bissell, whose activities usually resemble <sup>the</sup>



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Dr. Zeligs :

I was startled to see this. I send it in case you might have missed it.

AGAIN, the papers are edited, of course.

I have very good contacts at Random House. I could possibly get you an early look. I might suggest if you do not yet have a publisher in line that you write Random House and let them know of your work. They should be much interested, of course, and it would be worth their while perhaps to send you first advance uncorrected galleys so you can judge what is in the material. You might want to contact Norton Taylor and then again you might not. By contacting Random House it shouldn't be construed as any commitment or anything. I would suggest writing Bennet Cerf directly and he will turn the letter over ( I am assuming ) to the editor handling the book.

Best regards :

  
Robert Crichton

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### Physicist Is Found Dead; Wife and Partner Died in '60

IPSWICH, Mass., Nov. 4  
(AP)—A physicist whose wife  
and partner were found dead of  
cyanide poisonings on March 10,  
1960, was found dead today.  
The body of Dr. William  
Johnson, 47 years old, was found  
in a bedroom by Patrolman  
Frank Geist and Dr. William  
Wigglesworth. They had re-  
ceived telephone calls from a  
person they declined to identify.  
Dr. Johnson's wife, Nathalie,  
and his partner and friend, Dr.  
Daniel P. Norman, a bachelor  
and biochemist, were found dead  
by the Johnsons' son, Lorne,  
now 11. The Johnsons had two  
older children. The deaths of  
Mrs. Johnson and Dr. Norman  
were laid to cyanide taken in  
cocktails. No motive was given.  
The two scientists became  
known in the Alger Hiss per-  
jury trial. They examined the  
typewriter Mr. Hiss used to  
write messages to Whittaker  
Chambers. At the trial Dr. Nor-  
man testified that tests showed  
the typewriter had been used by  
Mr. Hiss.

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Nov. 11

Dear Dr. Zeligs :

In the chance that you missed this small item I  
send it along to you.

The heading of the clipping is absurd in not mentioning  
the Hiss case somewhere.

But this just becomes one more bizarre side issue. Certain  
cases seem to establish their own dark color and everything  
after that becomes tainted with the glum hues. What we have  
here are several figures of great interest ( since Hiss  
still hangs his case on the tampering of the typewriter )  
involved in a double suicide under wild circumstances and  
a later one with mysterious calls. It all certainly  
would seem to come from the dark brain of Chambers. I know  
this; no self respecting editor would allow such stuff  
to be included in a work of ~~art~~ fiction. Too implausible,  
too melodramatic, too obviously unreal. Well, here it  
is.

*R. C. Crichton*  
Best wishes :

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Note: Somewhere I neglected to  
mail this. Still might be  
of interest.