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March 25th, 1946

Dear Mr. Laxness,

I think you know that I arranged some time ago with Messrs. Allen and Unwin to publish over here your wonderful novel INDEPENDENT PEOPLE, a book for which I have immense admiration. I send you, under separate cover, a copy of our spring catalogue, on page sixteen of which you will find it announced in language that will give you an idea of how keen we are for it. It was, therefore, a matter of great satisfaction to me to learn not long ago that the judges of the Book-of-the-Month Club had accepted it as a monthly selection. They decided, however, to hold it in reserve, i.e., not to determine at this time the exact month when it would be sent out to their members. When I tell you that this guarantees a minimum distribution of four hundred thousand copies through the Book-of-the-Month Club alone, you will realize what this means in the way of circulation. It also means ~~means~~ that as payment for these four hundred thousand copies the sum of sixty thousand dollars will, in due course, be paid to Mr. Unwin's New York agent.

However, as I had his agent cable him a week or so ago, the judges of the Book-of-the-Month Club are very desirous indeed that certain changes be made in the book before they send it out. Mr. Unwin advised that I should communicate with you directly regarding these changes. I cannot do better than enclose a copy of a letter from one of the judges, the very successful American novelist, Dorothy Canfield. Other judges, in case you do not know their names, are Clifton Fadiman, the critic, Christopher Morley, John Marquand and Henry Seidel Canby.

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Please note that toward the top of page two of her letter, Mrs. Canfield says: "The passages I select for mention I chose because they show the kind of thing we have in mind."

Now what I want to know from you first is whether you are, in principle, willing to consider making these changes in your text. The Book-of-the-Month Club does not demand that you make them; the judges, I am sure, are entirely sincere in their conviction that the book will reach a much larger audience over here if you meet their wishes and will be more acceptable to American readers generally.

I will ask you, therefore, on receipt of this letter, to cable me how you feel about this. The cable could read either of two ways: (1) KNOPT NEW YORK WILLING LAXNESS, or (2) KNOPT NEW YORK ABSOLUTELY UNWILLING LAXNESS.

If you are willing, then the Book-of-the-Month Club will have an unbound copy of our book marked up by one of their people carefully to show you just what they think ought to be done and this will be airmailed to you, and you will be asked at the same time whether you would be willing to fly to New York to consult with some of the Book-of-the-Month Club people and come to an agreement on the spot regarding their final text. They would, in that event, pay ^{you} ~~the~~ round trip passage by air, though you would have to provide for your living expenses while you were here.

In this connection it might be well for you to add to cable number one above, if that is the cable you decide to send, the following words: WILLING COME TO NEW YORK IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUGGESTION MADE BY BOOK CLUB.

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There is not much for me to add to Mrs. Canfield's letter except to tell you that we have printed seventy-five hundred copies of your text as it appeared in England and these will be put into circulation when time for publication comes. Whether you feel able to meet the wishes of Mrs. Canfield and her associates will depend, it seems to me, on your own feelings about the text of INDEPENDENT PEOPLE as it stands. I am sure you will fall in with their suggestions if you feel at all able to do so. You will, I know, realize that speed in all of this business is essential.

Yours sincerely,

Alfred A. Knopf

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