

1 March 1948

Dear Eliot----

Ms now in Duell's hands. He said when I called him, "Wouldn't it be possible to make it a more modest publication?" on the heels of expressing his continued interest and excitement in the book. I don't think he's our guy, for reasons I'll tell in a minute, but it was only fair to give him a chance at it. If he doesn't want to give you full scope, I suggest we send it right down the list of big-name, old-time firms well able to gamble on a fine book even in a depression. Oxford University Press expressed interest in it long ago, and there are others who picked up their ears, when I mentioned it.

Now for the MS itself: Beau went over it too. We both think it is much better, but also that it could be better still. Beau remarked that whenever you yourself come into it things get going; why not more of your own experiences, photographing, making blinds, etc.? The new beginning has charm, and then you abandon the fisherman and yourself too, to some degree, and go from island to island. So much for us; now let's hope we get a real editor on it!

That's one reason why I don't think Charles is our guy; he does not have the genuine editorial thrust and pull, the ability to help focus. The next reason is that since early fall there have been persistent rumors that D S & P is shaky financially. Paul and I asked Charles several times if he wanted to be released from our book (he was so slow about starting production) and he emphatically

replied no. Then, two weeks ago, calling us in to discuss paper and production, he suddenly came to the conclusion that he dare not undertake so expensive a production for about another six months (printing costs are still terrific and the market for art books is very bad) and gave us permission to see if anybody else dared. So the New England book is now at Houghton Mifflin, and if they don't take it, will go the rounds. Charles insists he still wants to do it. He has called off production on Laura Gilpin's Rio Grande, too. So I have the feeling that any proposal he makes to you will indeed be modest. But that's no reason why the book can't be designed to fit a less exacting and expensive scheme than the Strand, where photographs and text must be either all gravure or all letterpress, and on the best paper, because they are one continuous whole and cannot be separated. The Maine book was always intended to have signatures of photographs---8 or 16---fitted in to the text, wasn't it? Or could be divided in some other way---text at beginning, photos at end, ~~or~~ with phrases from the text on facing page, or a signature or two at the beginning, then text, then the rest of the photos.

Wish there was a good literary agent who understands photographic books! We could all use one! If we should run through our list of publishing friends, I'll do my best to find some really top agent to take us on.

Incidentally, if we have to send the Maine book to others, do you think we could borrow the six beauties Eastman has? ^{We shouldn't} ~~I shouldn't~~ start anything there unless the prospects are serious and persuasion is needed on the color side. Maybe, if Eastman takes them, they might help with or even contribute the plates!

Swell to see Aline. She is so beautiful. Hope you and the children are all recovered---what virulent colds we've all had this winter!

Here's luck!

Best,