Dear Sumner:

It seems an eternity since we had an exchange of letters, and so much has happened in the meantime. First a word about myself.

The Government and people of Cuba were really most extraordinarily kind and generous in their various expressions before I left Havana. The Hacendados and Colonos had a public ceremony in the Institute at which Casanova and Santiesteban spoke in very unusual terms. Representatives of the leading Colonos and Hacendados from all over the island, as well as leading people of industry and finance, were present. To me the most interesting and gratifying feature of the ceremony was the fact that the Hacendados and Colonos joined together in this ceremony and it was a concrete expression of the fact that I have, during my tour of duty in Cuba, been able to bring about a closer connection between these two important factors in the life of the country which have had such long-standing differences. There are still differences between them, but the major breach has been healed, and the financing of the 400,000 tons last year was the instrument through which this became possible and used it to the best advantage. The Cubans gave a dinner at the Country Club at which over five hundred persons were present. The chiefs of mission of the United Nations had a dinner for us. The chiefs of mission of the American Republics had a luncheon at which Romero, the Mexican Ambassador, made a very interesting address and gave me a good send-off for Mexico. The American organizations in Havana had a big luncheon at the American Club.

The most significant occasion was the dinner which President Batista gave at the Palace. It is the first time since he is in the political picture that he has given any such dinner on his own initiative and except on what might be called a 'must' occasion. The dinner was entirely his own idea, and he had some seventy people there in the Palace. It was my understanding that

The Honorable Sumner Welles,
Undersecretary of State,
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that after the dinner he would simply propose a toast to me in a very few appropriate words. Instead of that, at the end of the dinner, to my surprise and I think to the even greater surprise of those present, he got up and made an extemporaneous speech of some twelve to fifteen minutes, which was undoubtedly sincere and during which he spoke with the most extraordinary frankness and definiteness both with regard to our country and to me. The dinner really had a significance in that Batista and his most intimate collaborators made the most definite expressions of complete identity with us; and I do not think there was any doubt among all his hearers as to his sincerity.

I had had a long talk with him the day before. He expressed great satisfaction what during the last two years so many problems between us had been settled and that our relations were on a basis which he could not conceive as being better. He expressed deep appreciation of our understanding and attitude and had unusually generous things to say about me and the part I had played in this picture, which I will not go into. He expressed his appreciation of the understanding and attitude of President Roosevelt and Secretary Hull and yourself. He pressed the opinion that the war would be a long one, but that Cuba would, whatever sacrifices involved, wish to be not merely an inactive ally but an active participant in the struggle. The question of supplies which they need for the army and navy is his principal cause of preoccupation, for he feels himself so powerless to do anything without at least a minimum of material assistance. I think he understands our situation and our difficulties very thoroughly, but, like other of our most sincere friends, he is unable to understand that we can do nothing at all. With respect to materials, I had a good many conversations while I was home with Vice President Wallace, with General Embrick, with Admiral Johnson and others - and with the President. Of these I made a memorandum of which Larry Duggan and Philip Bonsal have copies.

Before I leave this phase of my letter, I want to tell you once again how much I appreciate your unfailing and always helpful and constructive assistance in carrying through my tasks in Cuba. I have never in the field been supported more effectively by the Department than I was during my two years in Cuba. I am deeply grateful.

I think when I left Cuba we had settled every outstanding and long-pending matter in our relationships with Cuba. Before I left, Cortina informed me that Concheso had carried with him to Washington instructions to settle the Morris claim on the basis which we had approved. I hope the claimants and the lawyers will not quibble
quibble about the settlement, because I am confident that if they do not accept this settlement we will not get a settlement of the claim even if it means that Cuba would not get the $25,000,000.00 loan. The settlement which the Cubans are willing to make is entirely just and in my opinion more than equitable. They feel very strongly about the matter and it is unfortunate that this particular claim should have got mixed up with the $25,000,000.00 loan. I should like to repeat that if the claimants and lawyers do not accept this settlement, Batista, Cortina, and others in the Government feel so strongly about the claim that they would really rather forego the loan than make a settlement other than on the terms which the claimants had accepted and which we approved. With a country with which we have such close relationship in so many fields as with Cuba, we are bound to have many problems, but at least the most annoying are out of the way.

I prepared the way for Braden with the President and with others in the Government and many of my friends, so that he will have an unusually good start, and with his capacities I am sure he will have a very successful and productive tour of duty. He will find the new Embassy Residence ready for occupancy on arrival.

It had been my plan, as you will recall, to proceed directly from Havana to Mexico by steamer. The day before the steamer was scheduled to sail, my Military and Naval Attachees gave me such definite information with regard to the presence and operation of enemy submarines in the contiguous waters that I felt I had to take it up with the Department, and it was decided that I had better proceed via air to Miami and thence by rail. You know how the Germans have it in for me and it seems to be almost more than a coincidence that the submarines appeared in Cuban waters just at the time I was to sail. I felt it would be neither wise nor prudent to run the risk of prejudicing the ship and its crew because I was on board, or to give the Germans a chance to take some spectacular action. Our Naval Attaché therefore flew me and my family to Miami on February 9th, and we proceeded from there by rail. It was a long and not too comfortable a trip, as travel is heavy and adequate accommodations difficult to get, but in spite of that I arrived in Mexico City mentally refreshed, if somewhat physically tired.

From the time we reached Nuevo Laredo until we got to Mexico City we were met at the principal stations by the chief civil and military authorities. I was particularly interested to note that in each case the commanding chief of the district came to the station, and they were
were very generous in what they had to say. Every one of them took pains to assure me that he had instruc-
tions, and it was his desire, to cooperate with me in the most complete manner.

I am lodged with my family at the Hotel Geneve, which is very close to the Embassy and where I shall be until we can move into the Embassy Residence, which I hope will be in two months hence.

Apart from the major pending problems we have here, we have also the administrative and physical problem which has to be dealt with effectively without delay. You will recall that during the hearings on our appropriation bill before the House Committee recently, the Chairman of the Committee and others who had made this trip through the American Republics had some very hard things to say concerning our establishment in Mexico City. I regret to say that much of this criticism was justified. Mr. Daniels did not have any interest in administrative problems and at times did a good deal to impede good administrative practice rather than facilitate it. This was with the best intentions, but the effect was not good in an establishment which was rapidly growing and with responsibilities constantly increasing in volume and importance. I find therefore here a situation from the administrative and physical point of view which requires my immediate and urgent attention and must be dealt with without delay. I am not going to permit these administrative and physical difficulties and problems to impede my actuation in our major work here more than, in the circumstances, they must. You will appreciate that to carry through my major responsibilities I have to have a machine that works and adequately takes care of the secondary but at the same time important problems. I have been here only six days, but I think I have a good idea of the situation and am taking already the appropriate steps to pull the machine together. I shall need to some extent the Department's cooperation in this, I am sure I shall have.

This establishment has grown very rapidly and now we have over 160 people. It is probably the largest of our establishments abroad, next to London. It may undoubtedly grow further. We have recently effected consolidation through the visit which Charlie Hosmer made here as inspector. McGurk, the Counselor, is a good man who has done the best he could, but there were decisions which he could not make in the absence of the officer fully responsible. Now these decisions must be made.

We have a major physical problem. Repairs and construction in the Residence, which I had ordered on appropriate recommendation while I was Assistant Secretary in
in 1939, have not even been started. The Residence as a consequence, I was told, would be uninhabitable and I would have to seek a private house, as it would take at least a year to make the repairs in the Residence which would make it habitable. When I arrived here I found the Residence occupied by offices - and it is a fact that for residence purposes it requires emergency repairs before it could be occupied. Our people had been looking for a proper house outside, for several months, and I looked them over on my arrival, but found none which would serve our purpose except one which is not nearly so good as our own Embassy Residence and for which the owner wished $9,000.00 a year. I find that if certain emergency repairs are authorized in the Embassy Residence, and if I can carry them through without red tape, I can make the Residence habitable for less than $5,000.00 within a period of two months. I have gone into the matter thoroughly with the Americans long resident here, and with Mexicans who know the city thoroughly, and they are unanimous in their opinion that there is no house available in the city which is nearly so satisfactory for our purpose as the present Embassy Residence. In order to do my work here I shall have to have a proper house as a necessary instrument, and that as soon as possible. I have therefore written to Shaw fully and asked him to authorize emergency repairs to the Residence here at a cost not exceeding $5,000.00 and under conditions which will enable us to carry them through rapidly - which we can within a period of two months. In order to do this, however, the repairs will have to be considered an emergency measure so that we shall not have to bother about bids, specifications, etc., which would delay the work of these emergency repairs indefinitely; and you can be sure they will be carried through at the least cost and more effectively than if we had to follow all the red tape. I think you will agree with me that the rehabilitation of the Residence here, so that the Ambassador may have a proper place in which to live, is just as important as a defense measure as many others these days. I cannot do my work here from a hotel suite or from an inadequate residence rented outside. I mention this problem to you because it is essential that this living problem should be settled as soon as possible, for me to do my work most effectively; and I would appreciate your saying just a word to Shaw and to Davis to the effect that these physical problems we have here are to be facilitated in every way and speeded up.

The construction and repair work in the Chancery is in progress, but has been going very slowly. I am having this speeded up. We need some additional space which I can rent in appropriate buildings across the street from the Chancery - so that in this respect we
are most fortunate, as I wish to keep our establishment as compact as possible. All I need in this respect is the approval by the Department of the small sums I shall need for rent for additional quarters.

I called on Padilla last Wednesday and had a very interesting chat with him. He was most friendly and went very far in his expressions. I need not say anything to you concerning him, as you know him better than I do. I can only say that he went even further in his expressions than I thought he would; and that he is very close to the President, who depends on him almost entirely for the conduct of foreign affairs, is a very great source of encouragement. Padilla indicated that he was carrying the government and people in a forward policy as rapidly as he could and did not anticipate too great difficulties in this respect.

I present my letters of credence next Tuesday, February 24th, the President having fixed that date as he wants me to be with him on the occasion of the ceremonies of the 'Día de la Bandera.'

Certainly no one could begin his work under more favorable auspices than I am beginning mine here. There are, first of all, the November agreements brought about by the painstaking and constructive efforts of the Secretary and of yourself. There is the common danger, which is increasingly, I believe, felt here. In addition to this, there is no doubt that Najera has been most generous in the things he has said to the President and Padilla concerning me. Romero, the Ambassador of Mexico in Havana, who is a close friend of the President, has also written him on various occasions, I know. Padilla a good many years ago lived in Cuba and was an associate of Cortina. As a matter of fact, Padilla made a comfortable fortune in Cuba in those days. Cortina has already written to Padilla. In addition to this, I know that Batista has sent messages to the President and has instructed the Cuban Ambassador here, Carbonell — who is Dean of the Diplomatic Corps — that he is to assist me in every possible way. The press here has given me a good start, so that now, with the ground prepared by you all, I shall certainly have as favorable an ambiente as one could expect.

There are concrete matters concerning which I must have the counsel and help of the Secretary and yourself, and of which I shall be writing you shortly. I have in this letter merely wished to give you this general picture.

While
While writing this letter I have received your very generous note of February 17th in which you suggest the advisability of my taking a few days' rest at Cuernavaca before I begin my duties here. I think this might have been a good thing to do, because the two years in Cuba were strenuous and there has been really no interval except this tiring travel between the close of my work in Cuba and the taking up of my duties here. I appreciate your generous thought, but, as you so well say, these are not normal times, and we must do the utmost we can. My mother-in-law, who is quite advanced in years, and Marion do not seem to have felt the altitude very much. It has affected me somewhat in the usual way. I have lost a good deal of weight during this first week and have not felt any too comfortable, but I have no reason to believe all this is anything more than the usual accommodation to new conditions which most people have to go through when they come here.

I failed to mention that when I saw President Roosevelt the day of my departure for Cuba early in January, he asked me to give a personal message to President Batista. He asked me to say to President Batista how much he personally and our country appreciated the magnificently cooperative attitude which he as President of Cuba and which the Cuban Government and people have taken in the present situation. He also asked me to say to President Batista that it was quite some time since he had been in the United States, and that he would be very glad indeed to see him when he, Batista, might feel the circumstances propitious for another visit. President Batista was deeply appreciative of this message and I am sure particularly of the invitation to visit the United States again. In this latter respect, he said that of course he could not think of leaving Cuba for the present, but that he appreciated President Roosevelt's thought of him and that he would be only too happy to make another visit to the United States when the circumstances might be more propitious. I do not believe that Batista has any thought of going to the United States in the near future, but there is no doubt that he was deeply pleased with the President's message.

The other day when I saw Padilla he spoke with the greatest appreciation of the recent speech which you made in New York and said that he thought it would do a great deal to pull the Americas together. I have now before me a telegram from you dated February 20th stating that you have a message from Padilla and Castillo Najera congratulating you on this address. I am writing Padilla a note expressing to him your appreciation of his message.
I have some conception of the difficult task which you had in Rio, and of the magnificent way in which you carried it through. My sincere and deep congratulations in the interest of all of us. I had the hope that you would be able to take a little rest in Florida on your way north, but I understand that you did not tarry on the return trip.

With all good wishes to you and Mrs. Welles from us both,

Cordially and Faithfully yours,

O. S. MESSERSMITH