During the three years from 1934 to 1937 that we were stationed in Vienna we returned to the United States in the Spring of 1935, in the Spring of 1936 and in the Spring of 1937. It was while I was in New York in the Spring of 1936 or 1937 that the following incident took place. I will have to determine from my records as to whether it was in the Spring of 1936 or 1937.

While we were at the Hotel Marguery in New York I received a telephone call one afternoon from the secretary of Colonel House, who was living in an apartment just off Park Avenue somewhat above the Marguery. His secretary inquired whether I would be able to call on Colonel House the following morning at his apartment at around 11 o'clock. I said that I would be there. I had not the slightest idea as to why Colonel House wished to see me. I had not had the opportunity of meeting Colonel House up to that time. I searched my mind as to the reasons why he might wish to see me but could find none. When I arrived at his apartment the following morning at 11 o'clock Colonel House received me stretched out on a sofa with a rug covering him practically up to his chin. He excused himself for not getting up and said that he appreciated very much my coming in and that he wished to have a talk with me. Without going into any preliminaries he immediately began to talk about all sorts of things connected with Europe. He talked about Germany, he talked about England, he talked about France, he talked about Austria, he talked about the other countries of South Eastern Europe, he talked just a little bit about Russia but only in an incidental way. The conversation lasted for about an hour and a half without my having the slightest notion what it was all about. He was not necessarily or obviously searching my mind, but we discussed so many things concerning every phase of the European situation, political, economic and financial, that it was difficult to determine what the whole purpose of the conversation was. I was the more nonplused by the nature of the conversation because I was quite unaware that Colonel House had any connection whatever with the President or with the administration. It was my understanding that he had not
been well or more unwell than he had been for some time and that he was living very quietly and that so far as my knowledge went he certainly had no connection with European affairs or with the administration. During the hour and a half of the conversation I kept searching my mind as to what the purpose of the conversation might be and the only conclusion that I could come to was that he knew that I had some knowledge of the situation and was checking up information which he had from others, as he had not been able to travel recently.

After about an hour and a half of conversation, without any preliminaries, he stated as follows: "You are somewhat surprised by the nature of this conversation, I am sure. I must make my apologies. The fact is that I have been asked by President Roosevelt to talk with you to determine whether you will accept the post as Ambassador to Russia. For some reason the President thinks you are not interested or would not be interested and does not wish to be in the position of having you say no to him directly. I would like to know whether you would accept the post and the President has asked me to put it up to you."

I could not have been more surprised. The matter had not been broached to me in any way, even in the most indirect form. It was the one place I had no desire to go. It was the one place that I knew that my name, or so far as I knew my name had never been mentioned. I said to Colonel House that I was terribly sorry that he had been put to the trouble of exploring my views and my attitudes to the degree that he had and I appreciated the manner in which he had done it and I appreciated more than I could say the honor which the President was doing me in asking me to accept the post to Russia. I told him that it was quite out of the question. I said that for President Roosevelt I would do anything except this one particular thing, which I could not do. I said that my wife and I had had a sort of partnership ever since we were married and when I went into the Foreign Service immediately after we were married. I said that she had been willing to give what slender income she had to help to supplement my official income and what resources we had in order to do our job. I said that she had been willing to go anywhere that we had been asked to go.
I said that wherever we had been, she had always done her part of the job and that I considered that she had done 50% of it. There was one thing I knew about my wife and that was that she would not under any circumstances go to Russia. She would not stand in my way in accepting the post. She knew what an honor it was and she knew what an opportunity it was for me. On the other hand, it was the one place to which she had said she would not go. If I went to Russia I would have to go alone. That would be a great handicap. It was something I would not wish to subject my wife to and I did not feel that I could do my job staying there alone. Under the circumstances, therefore, I had to say that I couldn't go because I would not go alone and I would not ask my wife to go, and I knew that if I asked her to go, willing as she was to do everything that she could to help me and to help me serve my country, that she would not go to Russia. Colonel House said that he was very much surprised, that he was quite sure that my wife would do what I wished her to do. I told him that I knew my wife and that I respected her wishes and her understanding, but under the circumstances it was quite impossible for me to accept. He replied that under the circumstances it showed how instinctively the President realized my position and attitude, and he was very happy that the matter had been put to me in this way so that I did not have to refuse.

When I returned to our apartment at the Marguery I told my wife of the conversation and she said that she was sorry that I had had to say the only thing that I could say, because while she would not do anything to stop me from going to Moscow as Ambassador there, she would not accompany me there. She knew that it would not turn out well and that it was the one place that she felt that she couldn't go and that I shouldn't go, and that she was very happy that I had told Colonel House that I could not go.

I was quite intrigued about the whole matter because while I knew that Colonel House had played this very important role during the Administration of President Wilson, and while I knew that he and President Roosevelt were friends,
I had no knowledge of the close contact which apparently, from this conversation with Colonel House, existed. Without making any reference to the subject matter and without making any reference to the conversation which I had had with Colonel House, I called a friend in New York who knew was closely associated with both the President and Colonel House, and asked him what the relationship of Colonel House was with the President, and he told me that the President was in very close touch with Colonel House on a number of matters, and that while what the situation was a very different from what it had been with President Wilson, that the President did use Colonel House on various occasions. I still was not quite satisfied that the initiative had come from the President and I took occasion when I was in Washington a few days later, in talking with a friend of the President, to ask him whether he knew what the President had been thinking of another post for me. I understood that he was very desirous of my staying in Vienna, where he considered my stay useful. My friend said that he understood that the President had been thinking of the possibility of my going to Russia. I did not discuss the matter further with anybody and I made in this last conversation no reference whatever to Colonel House's conversation with me, and in a conversation which I had shortly thereafter with the President he made no reference whatever to the matter and said that he wanted me to stay on in Vienna as he found my letters from there most interesting and helpful and he was sure that my stay would be helpful in the general situation. I asked him if he intended that I should stay there for some time and he said that I could return to Vienna with the idea that it was his desire and Mr. Hull's that I remain there for the foreseeable future. There was not the slightest reference to this exploration which he had made through Colonel House. I was always very grateful to the President for having done the matter in this way.