It was in 1938 or 1939, or it may have been in the beginning of 1940, I shall have to determine from my records, that President Roosevelt, probably on the suggestion of Sumner Wells and certainly not on the suggestion of Secretary Hull, wrote letters to Hitler and to Mussolini. These letters were in the nature of an appeal to keep the war from breaking out. I did not see the letters which were sent by the President to Hitler and to Mussolini. In another memorandum I shall refer to various efforts which the President had in mind and which he did not carry through in order to bring about a personal meeting between himself and Mussolini and Hitler, in particular. One evening about 10:30 several months after I knew these letters had been sent, I was called by the President at my home in Georgetown, asking me to come to the White House without delay, if it was convenient. I told him I would be there in 20 minutes. When I arrived at the White House I was shown upstairs to his bedroom, where he was with several sweaters, as it was a cool evening, and he had his bed covered with papers. He handed me a letter in the form of a telegram which had just been received from Hitler. It was in German and he asked me to read it to him in English. I read the letter to him in English and it was quite obvious from the conversation which followed immediately thereafter that the President had got the substance, having had enough knowledge of German to really get the meaning of the letter. The only reason he had asked me to come in was to get, before he went to sleep, an accurate translation of the letter to make sure of his own reading thereof. There was very little discussion of the letter itself except the President saying that he supposed that that was what he had to expect, and my comment was that I was sorry that the letters had ever been sent because it was quite useless and they only created a wrong understanding of our own position and that they did not help things at all. I realized the good intentions which the President had had but that they were not men, either Hitler or Mussolini, with whom one could deal in the manner the
President had in mind. The President did observe that he had not had any reply or any acknowledgement of any kind from Mussolini to the letter which he had written to him.

It was some time afterwards, not very long thereafter, when I happened to be in the office of General Watson awaiting to see the President, who had asked me to come over. While I was talking with General Watson in his office, Prince Colono, who was then the Italian Ambassador in Washington, came out of the President's office and without looking at anyone and looking straight ahead and with a very red face and apparently quite embarrassed, walked through the room. He did not say a word to anyone, simply walking through the room and out. Immediately thereafter General Watson showed me in to the President. I found the President with a big grin on his face and he said, "I want you to know about the conversation which I have just had with Prince Colono. You know we are very old friends. We have known each other for many years. I like him and I think he likes me. He said he has been trying to see me for some time. He has been asking the Department for a conversation with me and I have side-stepped it. He has been asking the White House directly for a conversation with me and I have side-stepped it. I finally decided to let him come in. I knew what he wanted to say. I have not had any reply to the letter that I wrote to Mussolini at the same time that I wrote to Hitler. I knew that either Colono had a reply from Mussolini or had some excuses to make for their being no reply. I was not going to give him a chance either to deliver a letter or to make any excuses, so I decided to let him come in and as soon as he came in I spoke to him in the friendly, personal way that we had always spoken before I had become President and during the years that we had been friends. I carried on the conversation in such a way as to make it appear and make it clear that it was in no way an official conversation. Poor Colono was very much embarrassed and every once in a while he endeavored to deliver his message. I kept him on the hooks as long as I could. His embarrassment grew greater every minute. Finally
I said to him, 'Colono, we are old friends. My family, as you know, is a very old one in my country, as families go. If I recall correctly you trace back your family history directly to around the 9th or 10th century. In a family like yours and mine there are certain traditions, traditions that one holds on to, traditions that one holds on to under all circumstances. One of these in my family, and I am sure it is in yours too, is that if we get a letter, and a courteous letter, we answer it.'"

"As I was saying this I touched the button for Paul", meaning General Watson, "And Paul came in and Colono had no recourse except to get up and to walk out."

The President obviously enjoyed the whole incident and kept smiling during the rest of the conversation and chuckling, although we were talking about a rather important matter on which he had called me. It was obvious that he was thinking more of what had happened during the conversation with Colono than on the subject which we were discussing and on which he had called me.

Whether Colono ever afterwards delivered a letter from Mussolini in reply I do not know and I was not interested. A reply was certain to be equally innocuous and equally unsatisfactory as the one which Hitler had sent. I record this incident only because it shows this puckish humor which President Roosevelt had and also the skill which he had in handling situations of this kind in such a way that they could not cause any offense, but have a very profound effect.

There are a number of incidents which I recall which show how this puckish humor of the President showed itself but at the same time how he always used it in a way that was really useful and constructive.