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Personal

Habana, Cuba,  
March 26, 1940.

Dear Raymond:

This is just a word to let you know that we are getting very comfortably settled in our new surroundings. We moved into our new house in Vedado on the Thursday before Easter and spent most of the Easter holidays settling down. I think you will like the house when you see it and it has the great advantage of being all on one floor. Unfortunately, Marian's knee has not become much better even though it may not be much worse but that, you can appreciate, is no great comfort. She is being very brave about it for besides bothering her so physically it is naturally a blow to her pride. I seem to feel encouraged and believe that we will be able to get an improvement by the treatment she is giving it. We did not take the O'Donoghue house in the Country Club Park as the kitchen and pantry arrangements were inadequate and it would have meant a lot of inconvenience for us. The house we have taken is very representative and, at the same time, comfortable. We are getting our staff of servants built up and in the course of another week we should be functioning. Larkin is coming down about April 10th to open the bids for the new house and I am hoping that nothing may interfere with the progress on it. The only thing which could interfere with progress on the residence would be if the bids are much in excess of the allocation which we have made for the property. In case the allocation proves to be too small, I think we will have no difficulty in getting the Commission to give us a larger allocation for, while we are at it, the project must be carried through adequately. I was able to get a lease on the house for a year with the privilege of renewal thereafter on a month to month basis.

Everyone here has been most kind and we are really enjoying the life very much. So far as the personal side is concerned, we ought to be very happy and comfortable here. So far as the official side is concerned, it is quite clear

that

Raymond H. Geist, Esquire,  
Department of State,  
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that I will have my hands full but, on the other hand, it is equally clear that there is room for some very constructive work and I ought to have a very interesting time of it. That it will be difficult, there is no question, but I do not believe there is any reason to be discouraged. Rome was not built in a day and I will not be able to change things here in a day.

I read with a great deal of interest the Departmental Order creating the new Division which you are to head and I think the wording is excellent. So far as I recall, the final wording is that which we agreed on before I left Washington. I hope that you will be able to find a good man to help you, for that you will need. You and Mr. Long will have to decide on the individual, but I am hoping very much that you may decide to bring in some one not in the Service and he will be content to remain on a permanent basis. Of course, a great deal will depend, not only for the work to be done, but also for your own happiness, on whether this man is the right man. For that reason, I should be very careful in my selection if I were you, and in any recommendations to Mr. Long. I know that the foregoing observations are superfluous as you will, I am sure, have the same thoughts in the matter.

It so happens that at the very beginning of my stay here I am confronted with some particularly difficult problems which require my immediate attention and which I would have preferred, for a number of reasons, to take up later. I have, however, plunged right into things and am not going to allow myself to be discouraged by the obstacles which I am sure I shall meet.

I am delighted to know that your sister has arrived and that you are getting so comfortably settled. Marian and I both regret that we did not get to see her before we left, but sometime you must both make us a visit here. I hope that she will find the climate and the surroundings in Washington congenial and, so far as medical attention is concerned, which she may need, she will certainly find it in Washington.

I am sure that everyone is looking forward to the return of Mr. Welles and to hear what he may have to say concerning his conversations. I doubt whether anyone but the Secretary and the President will know very much about what actually he will say. I have a great deal of confidence in the judgment of Mr. Welles and I somehow believe that the trip will prove to have been useful.

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To my mind, however, there isn't any doubt that the Germans are going to try to carry through another bluff, which if it is called, they may find themselves under the necessity of carrying through. I hear that troop concentrations on the Dutch and Belgian frontiers are again in progress. They are undoubtedly making another threat and I do not believe that they wish to invade Holland and Belgium at this time. Some sort of peace proposals from the Germans are being put forward. Unquestionably this move against Belgium, and this threat of total war, are being made in order to try to force a more favorable reception of German terms which, I am convinced, England and France cannot and will not accept. I feel pretty sure that Hitler and Mussolini are both trying, or will try, to use Welles to get us to make some move which would lead to a negotiative peace. We simply cannot and, I am sure, will not lend ourselves to such a maneuver. We would be assuming a dreadful responsibility both as respects Europe and ourselves. I am convinced that a negotiative peace now would mean that in a few years hence we would have to fight both Germany and Japan on two fronts, and there would be no small nations and no England and France in a position to help us. The same tactics used so successfully by Germany in the past are now being employed by Russia and Germany with respect to Scandinavia. The Scandinavian countries are being told that any defensive alliance between them and Finland would be a "threat" and, of course, the object is pure intimidation. It will be interesting to see the reaction of the Scandinavian countries. Let us hope they will not permit themselves to be intimidated because if they do, the moral effect will be bad.

One thing that gives me a certain amount of concern is, that I believe there is little doubt that Hitler and Ribbentrop tried to urge on Welles the desirability of sending an Ambassador to Berlin. They, of course, want this for their own advantage and for the capital which they can make out of it. I know that you and I have not been quite in agreement on this point and that you have felt that there would be a certain advantage in our having an Ambassador there. You know that I have very high regard for your opinion and I hope that if your counsel is in any way asked in the Department you will bear in mind certain considerations which you and I know cannot be ignored, and in my opinion these are controlling.

In recent years, although we have had first class Ambassadors in Moscow, how often has our Ambassador been able to talk with Stalin? Perhaps once or twice in the course of recent years. We have Phillips in Italy, and certainly we could not do better there in our Ambassador, and how many times has he seen Mussolini in the last years. Perhaps two or three times at the most. You know out of your own personal knowledge

how often

how often our Ambassadors have seen Hitler since 1933. Hugh Wilson was there for two years, and how many times did he see him? The long and short of it is that the dictators do not want to talk with Ambassadors. They want the Ambassadors there for their prestige and for their own purposes. Kirk is able to do anything that we need to have done in Berlin today, and if there is any reason for any communication between the two Governments, the adequate channels are there. Our sending an Ambassador to Germany would cause great disillusionment, misunderstanding, and certain difficulty in our own country. Our sending an Ambassador to Germany would certainly disturb certain elements in Germany and would cause misapprehensions in all of the smaller States of Europe. You can understand how our sending an Ambassador would be misinterpreted by the German Government to the German people and by its agents to other Governments in Europe which are all looking to us to help them maintain their position. For us to send an Ambassador to Germany would be equivalent to a great country bending its knee before Hitler. For no reason whatever we would be adding one more to his diplomatic triumphs.

There are, of course, a lot of well-meaning people in our own country who believe that something would be gained through the Ambassador again being in residence. They don't know the facts as we know them and that is why we have to stand by our Government. It was well-meaning people who brought about Munich and the previous disasters. I am sure that neither the President nor Secretary Hull would favor our sending an Ambassador to Berlin at this time or in the foreseeable future for they realize we would have nothing to gain and that the action would have very undesirable consequences. There will, however, be constant pressure on the President and on the Department by well-meaning people at home, and by not so well-meaning people abroad, to this end.

I am convinced that there can be no peace in the world until this Government in Germany disappears. My own feeling is that we are a deeply interested party in this war. It takes a certain amount of courage to say it these days and I, of course, cannot say it publicly, but I have, as you know, constantly made known my attitude to my superiors, as it is my duty to do. If Germany should win this war, or ~~if there~~ <sup>ed</sup> should be a negotiated peace which will be no more than a bad truce, it would be the most disastrous thing for the world and for us that I can at present contemplate. This is a point on which I am sure we are in complete agreement.

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I shall miss our association and the daily contact which I thought of when we first planned your appointment to the Department. You are going to do a grand job in the Department and there is a real job for you to do. If at any time I can be helpful, I hope you will not fail to keep in touch with me. There is so much more that I wish to write you about, but I have already stolen this time out of a morning when I ought to be on other things.

Marian joins me in love and good wishes to you and your sister, and I hope you will write me when you can.

Cordially yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH

GSM:fm.