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Habana, April 11, 1940

Personal and
Confidential

Dear Friend:

I appreciated very much your note of April 5, and your writing me with regard to Professor Morison, who is coming here in June. I shall look forward to seeing him: it will be a pleasure for me to do what I can to make his stay pleasant, and a privilege to know him. You may be sure that my wife and I will look after him.

After several weeks at the Hotel Nacional we found a very comfortable house in Vedado, which was formerly the residence of President Zayas. It is in the Cuban style and on one floor, which is particularly fortunate, as Marion has been having some trouble with her knee, which makes it difficult for her to go up and down stairs. This started shortly before we left Washington and it got a good deal worse, but now there seems to be some improvement, which we hope will continue. It not only hurts Marian's pride to have to limp about, but it has been really very painful. There seem to be several pieces of ligament in the joint which have calcified, and the doctors at home seemed to be rather pessimistic as to what they could do about it.

We are now very comfortably settled in our new home, which is in every way adequate. We have lots of room, and you know that it comes from the heart when I repeat what I told you in Washington--that

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The Honorable
Felix Frankfurter,
Supreme Court of the United States,
Washington, D. C.

it would give us very real pleasure to have a visit from you and Mrs. Frankfurter whenever it may suit your convenience. This is really a delightful spot, and if you do not know it it is another reason why you should come here.

Our Government is planning to build a house here, and we opened the bids yesterday. Fortunately, the bids are within the limit of the money which has been appropriated and set aside for the purpose, so that we ought to be able to make very rapid progress and get the house built within the next year. Whether I shall be here to live in it when it is completed is problematical, but it will be fun to help to build it.

Cuba is passing through a very difficult period, but the developments are really, on the whole, in the right direction. The great majority of the Cuban people, including the masses, are conservative in what they like to call the Rooseveltian sense. They realize that there has to be a restoration of constitutional government and of political and financial stability or they will have a return of some of the disastrous years which they have had in the past. I am doing what I can to help them along the right path. How delicate a task this is I need not tell you. I have had to say some very frank and some very clear things--and, at times, some hard things --with a smile: but I am one of those who believe that in the relationships between States the truth is the best, unpalatable as it may be at the time.

Batista and Menocal have made a bargain, and this seems to assure that the army will be kept out of the elections and that there will be peaceable elections. I am not attempting to pass any judgment upon the merits of the Batista-Menocal arrangement. I am sure General Menocal found it a bitter pill to swallow, but I am inclined to think that he did what he did because he felt that he could, in the end, do more with Batista than with Grau. Grau is a man of merit, but there seems to be a feeling here that he

is too much influenced by the extreme radicals in his group: I do not know him well enough to have any views on that. I do know that Batista has learned a lot, and he is a man with the intelligence and intuition to learn rapidly. How this arrangement between Batista and Menocal is going to work out it is hard to say, but we have to accept it as a fact and now make the best out of it we can.

The Constitutional Assembly is in session here, and it has produced some articles which are worse than anything that Soviet Russia produced in its worst stage. The delegates to the Assembly are trying to legislate away in the constitution every ill of the Cuban people. If they followed out their present ideas they would have a document which would, in fact, be a code of laws--and a code of laws which would make Mexico seem a paradise for capital. We are, of course, not interfering in these internal matters; but, naturally, we have a very deep interest in the maintenance of stability and of confidence, so that I am doing everything that I can without mixing in things in a way which could cause resentment or trouble. I have to watch every step that I take, and in saying that I am saying a lot. In many respects Cuba is in the same stage of political development that we were in about a hundred years ago, except that we did have a lot of honest men in politics. There are some who seem to think that I have been able already to do a little to keep things going in the right direction. I am not, in matters like this, inclined to over-optimism, but I will certainly not leave one stone unturned in my endeavor to make it clear how necessary political and financial stability are to establish that confidence which must exist if public and private initiative in our country are to be free to take those constructive steps which are possible if those conditions exist.

I cannot even begin to comment on the developments of the last few days, but I am convinced that the German activity is largely the result of the Germans' necessity for getting an early victory--

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for, otherwise, they certainly face the defeat which I am sure they will have, in any event, in the end. I keep in touch with my well-informed friends in Europe, and I know that the Germans are in a bad way for gasoline and iron, as well as for lubricating oils. They are not in a position to maintain war on any considerable scale for a sustained period: they know this. The keeping open of the supply of iron ore from Sweden is absolutely essential for them. Only one of the four plants to extract iron from the low-grade ores in Germany has been completed: I am not sure that it is actually in operation. The other three have practically only been started. Goering hoped to have all of them in operation by this time. Lubricating oils in highly mechanized warfare, and especially for planes, are of primary importance, and Germany does not have adequate supplies of lubricating oils. I would be more accurate in saying that it has a fair supply of lubricating oils, but no way of replenishing that supply adequately. I have consistently felt that the strength of the German military machine has been over-estimated in the sense that, while it has striking power and is an imposing machine, it does not have behind it the economic setup which is necessary for the maintenance of such a military machine in action. It is a machine well adapted for the sort of things Germany has been doing to weaker countries, but it is not a machine which can stand the strain of sustained effort.

I had some fear some time ago that a good deal of pressure might be brought on the President and the Secretary to send an Ambassador to Germany. There are so many well-meaning people at home--among them a good many people, on the whole--who, somehow, feel that we would be in a better position if we had an Ambassador in Berlin. It doesn't make sense, of course, because the dictators do not want to talk to Ambassadors. We have had an Ambassador in Russia for years, and I think Davies was the only one who saw Stalin--and he saw him just before he left. We have had Phillips in Rome for years, and I doubt

whether

whether he has seen Mussolini more than three times during this period. The last three Ambassadors we had in Berlin probably saw Hitler, on the whole, only three or four times: I doubt whether Wilson had any conversation with him of any account except when he presented his letters of credence. The dictators find it much more convenient not to have to talk to Ambassadors. That is one reason why I saw no harm in Sumner Welles' going to Berlin and Rome, where Hitler and Mussolini would have to talk to him; for, by what they said or didn't say, we would know a lot. I am sure that there has been no danger of our sending an Ambassador to Berlin and giving this diplomatic victory to Hitler which he so much wants, for the President and the Secretary are certainly fully understanding of the situation and would not, I believe, consider it for a moment. They know that there is nothing which we could do which would be more disastrous in the European situation than this--for it would give the German people the impression that we were condoning what was happening in Germany and what the regime was doing outside Germany, and our action would be misinterpreted in practically every capital of the world. In southeastern Europe, particularly, our sending an Ambassador to Berlin would have a weakening and disconcerting effect. Hitler and Ribbentrop, of course, want it for the prestige they could get out of it, and they are crafty enough to get men in our own country, like Ham Fish, to speak for them. I think even those who may have been trying to bring pressure for the return of an Ambassador to Berlin now realize how foolish they were, when they witness the events of the last few days.

I am convinced still that there is no way in which there can be any peace, nor any safe steps toward peace, as long as this government remains in power in Germany. Certainly we, in our country, cannot lend ourselves to any movement for an arranged peace which would be no more than a bad truce and which, in my opinion, would result in our being drawn into a war later on two fronts, when there would be

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no England or France or ~~similar~~ countries which could give us any assistance. There is no question but that Hitler's ultimate objective is to get hold of this continent south of us; and if there were to be a German victory we would have repercussions immediately in practically every country in the western hemisphere, from Mexico on down. I hope we will see where our enlightened self-interest lies. If we do, we will give England and France every possible assistance that we can, short of sending men: if we do that, we won't have to send men now or later. I still think that England and France can win this war without us, but I think it is our duty to give every possible help that we can now, because it will be the cheapest and the safest for us, in the end. We all know that our foreign policy should be governed by enlightened self-interest, and there certainly does not seem to be any doubt as to where the interest of our country lies at this juncture. In any event, I am sure that we will not lend ourselves to any move which will, in any way, give aid or comfort to Germany, and that we will not, in any way, foster a move which would bring about a peace, until we are certain of the elimination of the present government in Berlin.

This is already too long a letter, but I have enjoyed this opportunity for a chat with you.

My wife joins in all good wishes to you both.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

(The Ambassador)

GSM/dec