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February 7, 1940.

Personal and confidential

My dear friend:

Your letter of October 21, 1939 reached me in due course through the good offices of our Embassy in Belgium and I have this morning received your very generous note of January 5 of good wishes in connection with my appointment to the mission in Cuba. I am deeply appreciative of your good wishes and equally so of your understanding of my failure to write you sooner in reply to your most interesting letter of October 21. I have had your letter of October 21 continuously before me and have put off writing you as I wished to give you some of my thoughts upon the problems you touched upon. As a matter of fact, I have had a very difficult life since I came here several years ago and it has been almost impossible to carry on any personal correspondence.

I was asked by the President and the Secretary towards the middle of 1937 to leave my post in Vienna and return to the Department in order to undertake some work here which they felt was highly desirable should be accomplished. The Department of State is the smallest of our Government departments and has always been very well organized and a relatively efficient organization. In view, however, of the thought that the President and the Secretary had that the international horizon was becoming darkened and that there were definite clouds perceptible on the horizon they wished the "Ship of State" to be put into as good condition as possible to weather the storms so far as we were

concerned

The Honorable
Frans Van Cauwelaert,
Chamber of Deputies,
Brussels, Belgium.

Van Cauwelaert, Frans

concerned. It was, therefore, a real mark of confidence on their part to ask me to come in and undertake this work, but I must admit that I did it with considerable hesitation, as I realized the burdens it would involve.

It was my task to carry through a rather complete reorganization within the Department of State in order to fit it and its various units so that they might best take care of the increasingly complicated problems arising in our foreign relations. This, I am glad to say, we have been fairly well able to do and we have carried through this reorganization in a quiet way so that the outside world hardly realized it was going on. We had the further problem of strengthening the foreign arm of our Department which is the Foreign Service. We have over a number of years been taking very definite steps to strengthen our Foreign Service and had really reached the point where we had a very effective career representation. There was, however, some duplication in our representation abroad in the sense that both the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture had a Foreign Service. Efforts had been made from time to time to bring these Foreign Services of Commerce and Agriculture into the Service of the Department of State but there were so many factors involved that little progress had been made. It was with infinite pains that we finally succeeded in getting through the Congress the enactment of a statute which gives us a single Foreign Service of this Government under the Department of State.

We also had a considerable legislative program which had been pending for some years and it was our effort to get this through. I am glad to say that in this respect too we made very real progress.

Any one of these three tasks would really have been sufficient for one person to attempt, but in addition to carrying them through I could not, of course, divorce myself entirely from the political and economic problems of the Department which had such a real interest for me. The result was that I really tried to do too much in a short space of time and it took its toll. I am no longer so young as I was and no

longer

longer so young as I feel and I fear that I did myself a certain amount of physical injury by the too long hours and the too great concentration.

The foregoing, my dear friend, is the reason why I have been so remiss in personal correspondence with you and with other friends during the last few years and also the reason why I am leaving the Department at this time to go to a post in the field. As a measure of conservation of my health, I felt that it was imperative that if I was to have any usefulness in the future I divorce myself, at least for the present, from the duties here which were becoming increasingly onerous. I therefore welcomed the opportunity which the President and the Secretary gave me to take charge of our mission in Cuba where we have important problems and where developments mean a great deal more in the general picture than the size and population of the island would indicate. I shall have adequate work to keep me occupied but the scope of my activities will be necessarily restricted so that I look forward very much to the opportunity to build up reserves for any task which I might have to carry through later. As a matter of fact, Habana is not very far from Washington and I hope to be able to keep in close touch with the problems which have so deeply interested me for a number of years. I have not hesitated to give you these personal details as you are among those of my friends whom I would wish to know my motives for anything that I may do and I need not tell you how much I cherish that friendship.

I would, of course, have been very glad to go to Belgium, for it has always been my ambition to go there as Ambassador some day, but under the present circumstances I think there are many reasons why it is preferable that I should go to the post in Cuba. It still remains my hope that in the not too distant future I may have the great privilege of serving my Government in your capital.

We here in this country are naturally concerned with the developments in so many parts of the world. The people in this country I believe are very fully and adequately informed on these developments. The

sympathies

sympathies of our people are overwhelmingly with England and France. This is so because they have absolutely no sympathy with totalitarian or autocratic governments and because our Government and people are definitely attached to certain fundamental principles which we believe must lie at the basis of the relationships between states. In other words, we believe that the sovereign rights and territory of other states, however small they may be, must be respected and that any changes which are brought about must be brought about by negotiation and mutual understanding rather than by force. I think it is the definite feeling of the people in this country that this war was inevitable in view of the desire of the present Government in Germany to impose its will on a good part of Europe. While it is the desire of the people of this country to keep out of war, there is every desire on their part to do what properly can be done to aid in an allied victory, for they believe that victory is essential to the peace of the world and to the maintenance of the principles underlying law and order as well as decency in the world.

This desire of this country to keep out of war is, of course, selfish and egocentric, but no more so than it is the desire of every country and people for there is no doubt that in every country the people would prefer to live at peace with others. This is just what makes the situation so serious, for we have in some countries governments which pay no regard either to the interests or desires of their people. Of these, Germany is the only one which in my opinion presents a lasting and real danger and it is for this reason that the majority of the opinion in this country is that there can be no peace in the world and no possibility of a return to law and order until the present Government disappears and Germany has a government which expresses what we still believe is the will of the great majority of the German people, to live at peace with their neighbors and to respect to their rights. There are all sorts of rumors of peace negotiations and undercover efforts to bring about a basis for peace, but so far as I can see there can be no serious consideration of negotiations for peace with the present Government in control in Germany.

I believe

I believe, therefore, that England and France can entertain no negotiations for peace with the present Government in Germany, and that seems to be their present temper. Any arrangement of the kind which so many people envisage today would merely mean the establishment of an armed truce which would inevitably result in another war and at a time when England and France would be in a less favorable position to defend their vital interests.

I have noted with particular interest the comment which you make on the situation of your own country and I have followed developments in that respect with the keenest interest. It would indeed be a catastrophe if in this same generation your country should again have to bear the calamity of an invasion by Germany, and yet I think if a realistic view is taken it must be appreciated that this has been and still is a part of the German strategy. There seems to be no doubt that in November last and in January of this year definite plans had been made for the invasion of Holland and Belgium. Whatever the reasons may have been for the actual attack not taking place, this does not affect the fact that it was definitely a part of the German plan. My own belief is that with the outbreak of the war it became inevitable that the Army should resume a good deal of its former power in Germany and that it is increasingly a decisive factor in decisions of policy. It is, I think, very likely that, although the invasion of Holland and Belgium is always a part of German military as well as political strategy in time of war, the Army increasingly appreciates the dangers which such an extension of its lines would involve at this time. While I think the danger of invasion is real still, I am hopeful that with the progress of the war this danger will become less real.

I have noted with very particular interest your comment with regard to the increasing conviction in Belgium as to the community of interest between Holland and Belgium. There is no doubt of this. The invasion of Holland by Germany unopposed by Belgium could certainly not give any satisfaction to Belgium because it would merely mean that the Belgian position would be that much more difficult and its ability to resist diminished. The German strategy, of course, has been to take one country after the other and by threats, promises, et cetera, to keep others from taking any action. They

have

have tried to pursue this same policy with respect to Belgium. The only safety for Belgium, of course, in the opinion of most people is that in case of attack by Germany on Holland Belgium immediately take action. It is the only safety for Belgium and, even though a part of its territory should be occupied for a while, it would give the greatest security and in the end that territory would become its own again as it was after the last war.

There are many things concerning which I would like to write you but I am unfortunately unable to do so now and I shall endeavor when I have some leisure later to write you about some of the things on which I would like to exchange views. I think you will find that our new Ambassador to Brussels is a very charming and capable man. Mr. Cudahy is an old friend and I will be appreciative of any courtesies which you may find it possible to show him.

I shall be leaving for Cuba at the end of this month and if you should have any letter which you would wish to send me you can send it through the good hands of Mr. Cudahy to the Department in Washington which will see that it reaches me.

I am delighted to know that your daughter is still serving as your secretary and I hope you will give her my very best wishes. Mrs. Messersmith and I often speak of you and Mrs. Van Cauwelaert and we remember particularly the last visit we were able to have in Vienna. I am sure that we shall all live to see happier times and that the world will be rid of this scourge. It means, however, that some of us will have to go through the fire again in one way or another and it means that everywhere decent people must not permit themselves to submit either to fear or to opportunism. It is only a stern facing of the facts and a willingness to make the sacrifices which the maintenance of decency has always required through which we will be able to rid this world of the scourge which is afflicting it.

Believe me, with every good wish to you and your family in which Mrs. Messersmith joins,

Cordially and faithfully yours,