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Habana, Cuba,  
December 15, 1941.

My dear Friend:

I have your letter of December 10 which reaches me at a time when I have probably never been more busy. In addition to all the work which has fallen on us as a result of the declaration of war on Japan, Germany and Italy, I am in the midst of a number of negotiations of a major character, including one for a commercial treaty and one of sugar, both of which are difficult and have taken a great deal of my time. I have literally been busy night and day for weeks and have had really more on my shoulders than I can carry. There are times when the spirit is willing but the flesh becomes weak. My health has been much better since I returned from the holiday at home and the results show that I was wise to take the holiday in the form of an absolute rest. I was naturally sorry not to see my friends while I was home but if I had tried to do that, it would not have been a real holiday.

Now that great decisions have been made, my country has responded to a man, as I knew it would. Japan could have done us no better service than by engaging in this dastardly and unprovoked attack, for nothing could have consolidated opinion in my country more than this. Now it is a question of winning the war and I think none of us are able to say how long or how short a time it may take. I am not one of those who is overly optimistic as a rule and I am not one of those who does not realize the difficulties in the way of a complete victory which we must achieve. On the other hand, I think there are evidences of the beginnings of the disintegration of the German power. The Russian defeats which Germany is suffering are in no sense decisive but the enormous losses they have had and the psychological affect of defeat are without doubt a serious factor in the war. The Japanese have, I think, shot the major bolt they had in their quiver during the first week of the war and although

we are

The Honorable  
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we are seriously handicapped in carrying on the war with them at so great a distance, I do not believe that Japanese resistance will last very long. On the whole I am inclined to believe that there is at least a possibility that the war will be ended in a year. Whether or not it takes longer, that the victory will be ours, I am certain.

In the meantime, however, there is a very great deal to be done and I am sure that you have accomplished a great deal during your trip through the American republics. I had written to my colleagues with regard to you and I have received very interesting letters from them, all of them expressing deep interest in having seen you and the opportunity of meeting you and several of them spoke in strong terms of the usefulness of your visit and what you had done. I am convinced, therefore, that you have made a very real contribution.

So far as Cuba is concerned, her reaction has been 100% and of all the American republics, she is lending us the most complete cooperation. Some of the American states, particularly Argentina, are not showing an adequate reaction, but I think this is due as much to difficult internal situations as to any other factor and the attitude of the Government in the Argentine does not, I believe, reflect the attitude of its people. On the whole the reaction in the other American republics has been, I think, satisfactory.

Naturally I regret leaving Cuba where my life has been as happy as life can be anywhere in this difficult world and the work has been so pleasant. The only post that Mrs. Messersmith and I have had which we left with more regret than Cuba was Antwerp where you all received us with equal generosity and kindness.

On the other hand, of course, I am deeply grateful for this additional mark of the confidence of the President and Secretary Hull. I am going to a very difficult task and some believe that it is the most important and most difficult diplomatic post we now have since we have retired our Ambassador from Tokyo. I do not shrink from the new tasks and I only hope that I may be able to meet them adequately.

I know with

I know with what joy you will be returning to the United States and to your family and be able to be with them during the Christmas holidays. My own plans are very uncertain. I expect to be in Washington around the end of the year for some days and then return to Habana as we plan to go from Habana to Mexico direct towards the middle or latter part of January. If I am in New York I shall try to see you and the family as it will give me so much pleasure. Mrs. Messersmith, unfortunately, will not be able to go home with me but will remain here.

I have noted with interest what you say concerning the Belgian Chargé d'Affaires in Mexico and will bear this in mind. There is so much that I would like to write you but I am so overwhelmed with my duties that it is almost impossible to write any personal letters of a satisfactory character.

With affectionate regard for you and Mrs. Van Cauwelaert and your family, in which Mrs. Messersmith and Mrs. Mustard join,

Cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith

GSM/jm