

American Legation
Cairo, Egypt
October 7, 1946

Dear Frank,

I shall remain "near the top of" your "mental list!" I court alliance with the great, and you, Sir, are a giant of effrontery, the Shakespeare of courtesy. When Methusalah was a young man one lent him a book; upon restoring it shortly before his death, this biblico-cleptomaniac, hearing that it was necessary to be met by great-grandsons, was huffy. Mr. Shields, why are you huffy! Mr. Shields, recollect, any emotional state, friendship let us say, is attended by visible signs; I think you will grant some rapport between the body and the mind. (That's the least you can do for me!) To accessible friends this sign is a visit; to distant friends it is a letter. If the duty of one friend is forbearance when it is bruited that ~~if~~ Frank's hands are amputated, in addition to the paper shortage; it is the other's duty to write when he can.

Marriage, a like rapport, sifts my point to better advantage. The sign here is - if I may be excused - intercourse. You may love your Mrs., to say the least, impetuously; however, to forget that group of distinctive, er, manual operations (I grant that there is bother connected with it) will, after ten years perhaps, cause a murmur of anxiety from your spouse. It is better to offend friendship than ignore it; offense is subject to forgiveness; what is the answer to indifference? Offense stirs up, but silence persuades it into deep sleep. What psychology, I ask calmly, is sitting at the back of a mind like this! Your letter paper ought to come blank - you are speechless; crumpled - the body posture as you creep to embrace my feet; Remorse the water-mark. But, all said and done, I accept. "Que voulez-vous, je l'aime!"

I know all about you from the Mater, my Mater, not yours. You're going back to school, that is good news. I admire your spunk, and I know you will be successful - in anything you try - anxious, but successful. Classes are held also in my office; my clients are my pedagogues, visiting professors; I summon them from undique et ubique; like a

frieze on Greek goblets that my hands spin, the personnages leaping free with gestures of unrestraint; the civil confession box, the mart of tears. I have acclimated myself to my work, though I don't expect to stay in it. It is excellent work in truth.

But you have all that from the folks. You know, I think, that for one month I enjoyed the good fortune of an occasion to operate the Consulate, while Mr. Miller, my Consul-general, was absent in Switzerland. This work comprised United States matters in Egypt and the Sudan, together with a kind of archeopiscopal control over other Near East offices with respect to ships and planes, over Istanbul, Beirut, Jerusalem, Bagdad, Tehran, Ades Ababa, and Mombassa. There are other services, invoices, notarizations, rescue of Americans from the jail, court cases, functions, testaments, legitimations. However, the task in which I take most delight, is meeting those who have an eye on the United States, who have never been, to obtain a visa of any type, student, business, travel, or immigrant; them I answer Statim ex corde "straight from the heart", anxious to relieve as quickly as I can their knowledge, that I have the choicest blessing to confer, or direst judgment to impose. I meet many persons in this way; my correspondence is a trans-world network.

When are you going to marry Peggy? I hope her increasing girth is not a reflexion against your temperance. Marriage and courtship have two things in common, a man and a woman; everything else is in private. I hope Joe is not wasting his time; I should think he would be happy in skilled handicraft. There was that checkerboard he constructed, gadgets like that World(s Fair thing. Yet, if he is contented... Dot is out of my life, she didn't answer my letter. There's a family of them. Ma and Pa - God give them health! - must take pride in their industrious children. One is blessed to have been allotted to good parents; for their bounty is a good son.

Is there anything I can get you, Frank? I suppose your Egyptian interests are confined, but you might think of something. And I have access to the attachés for facts on schools, oil, press, commerce, and ships, if your interests include that. Or postage stamps?

You bring up the question of religion, most delicate. And I shall be frank. I am not a Christian. My fondness for the doctrines of Christ is higher than when Teresa's rose was kissed at the altar at St. Michael's. I have been looking, not at what Christianity says, but what Christians do; that disgusts me. Napoleon, Metternich, Von Pappen, Peggy Joyce, Huey Long, the lynchers, the Daughters of the American Revolution, these are Christians, not I. If I defend the Church it is sentiment; if I assist at Mass it is fear; in time I shall not do either. None of my acts in connection with Catholicism is sponsored by intellect, except one, that of taking my leave. Religions are like phoenixes, out of the ash every thousand years. Primitivism, paganism, stoicism, Christianity... The Catholic Church was a double-lived phoenix, a tough bird, a darling old bird, but phoexicular. As to the sequel, whether Atheism can assume the properties of a religion, God knows; but God is, and must be worshipped.

I don't think my parents - especially mother - would like to hear this; consequently I don't intend to tell them. As to the others, do not feel obligated to "protect" me. Perhaps St. Michaels and St. Johns ought not to know; however, as I would not tell to anyone, what I felt must not be known at all, let me leave silence to your discretion, rather than my injunction.

John Collon
JW

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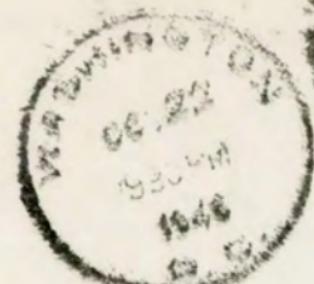
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