

American Embassy
Cairo, Egypt
March 9, 1947

Dear Frank,

The keenest humiliation for a man is to tell him he bears a striking resemblance to somebody else. This wounds his passion for identity. You may perceive, then, what a shock it was for me to notice how close I was to becoming as tardy as you in answering letters, and that each day brought me closer and closer to your example. I had to make that stop.

I am very curious myself to see what the rest of the world is like. I too want to buy a "sailboat" and go out "three years". In fact, there is nothing else, except my parents and a few friends at home, which has any attraction for me except this idea. For I, like you, am a seeker after the truth. An increase in salary for which I have waited months gives less pleasure, to me, than the sight of a Kufic frieze which I come on unexpectedly; Assuan's sunsets kindling above the Libyan desert, are no less intense, and doubtless they suffer less diminution from recurrence, than any love of any person. But it is humanity that I most wish to see. How do men act where machines are lacking to give needless comforts, where the alphabet is not Phoenician, where the morality is not Christian? I want to remove myself, and all my faculties, to a place out of sight; there I'll take the granite of my life, blotched by the arbitrary and tasteless embellishments of countless forefathers, and grind it against that other culture, similarly blotched, that other granite, and when both appear in the grain I shall know, at last, what is human.

The unfrocked priest in Somerset Maugham's "The Razor's Edge" describes us both in a pat phrase, "You are a very religious man, who does not believe in God." It is western idealism makes us so, the light, or burden, of two thousand years of Christianity. One must either discover a higher truth than the one we had, or else truth will come of

itself. The truth that comes of itself is a cruel truth. For if God is dismissed, man is no longer godlike; man is an animal; and presently persons will take up the inquiry, as Nietzsche did, and others will put it, as Adolph Hitler did, to practical application, why, man being an animal, the laws of nature with respect to animals are not best in ruling the human species, why meekness ought not succumb to force. That is the truth which comes of itself. We seek the other. Who dares to say we are wasting our time!

There are many construction engineers go through here to Bahrein, Dahrān, and the south of Peria, but I don't suppose you would be interested in these difficult, hot places. I am not surprised that you and Gene assist, practically alone, at the Alumni sessions. You always attached yourself to a group by strong allegiances; you were firm in your attachments, to your class, your school, your country, your faith. I, on the other hand, have never been firm in anything, don't give a tinker's dam for the school, and treason, the word shocks me more than the fact. I always admired you for this quality, and envied you, because I saw it procured for you the regard of those whom you associated with. You will be happy as long as you find something to be loyal to, and I only when bound by none. Now Eugene goes because he has nothing better to do, or is easily persuaded. Frank Brennan goes because he must be of importance somewhere. The rest who do not go would shriek ~~you~~ at you for questioning their loyalty, but are loyal, and then alone, when it squares with pleasure. For most men allegiance is merely a vent to excuse their wrath against the foreigner, since it is human to be cruel.

You say "Romeo and Juliet", Frank? How delightful! It was useless being brought up in New York. What we have at birth means little to us. How I once criticized the Metropolitan Opera performances! Well, now I am in Cairo. There is no music except the Palestine symphony at intervals, or a troop blown in for a week from La Scala, Milano. How excellent in New York! Then I went to Port Said for a month, and sitting

there in the Majestic cinema, with a Greek fisherman who had brought his fish with him, on one side, and a squawking British major on the other, I longed for the refinement and elegance of Cairo. But in Luxor it is Port Said. Relativity, relativity, my man! that is the source of all pains. I cannot even retain my dinner, for what is fixed with the teeth at one extremity, slips with a sigh from the other.

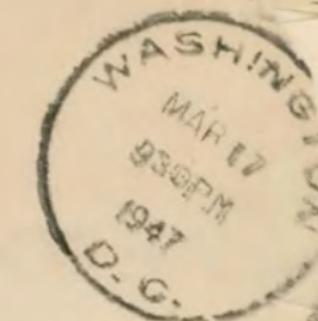
~~Your friend,~~

~~John Collon~~

John F. Colton
ECONOMIC ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

~~OFFICIAL BUSINESS~~

American Embassy
Cairo, Egypt
c/o Dept. of State
Washington, D.C.



Mr. Francis J. Shiehls
244 87 ST.
Brentwood, N.Y.

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in country indicated by postage.

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