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*M.R.*

Dear Dr. Saiyidain:

Your beautiful Christmas letter, brings back, as it does each year, memories of other times and other places. I am happy that it finds you cheerful and thankful and not unduly worried about items like "left ventricular failure". I think you are always so--at any rate this is how I remember you and how I hope you will be when I see you again--when ever that may be.

I was reading in the Columbia Forum a piece about Simone de Beauvoir and her latest work *La Vieillesse*, in a sort of quasi-interview recorded by a Columbia alumnus who lives in Paris and writes quite often for the Forum. He quotes DeBeauvoir as saying "Even at my age, my relationship with other generations has been transformed. Only one generation is older than mine, it's extremely scattered, and death is waiting for it. Mine, once crowded, has become rather impoverished." It is a gloomy thought though trenchant. But she also says: "The advantage of a long life is that that you've had a richer, more subtle experience of humanity. This is an advantage I feel personally, because I understand things better than when I was 40. I know more about what life is."

As I read these sentences, I felt like saying "me too". But I also realized that DeBeauvoir and you have both accomplished something that I have been avoiding, namely, the acceptance of the passage of time, and the acceptance, in time, of the fact that our world--the world we made for ourselves, around us, as we grew and learned, is changing before our eyes into a world of others, no longer ours. We still share it, but if we stay too long we may, more or less politely be invited to compose ourselves in a corner.

It is not very long ago that I responded to such ideas as this with a determination to prove that chronology, in my case, was irrelevant. And of course, if one tries to establish such proof, one can, for there are always sit-

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uations in which an older man, in full possession of his senses, can outshine a younger one. But now, over the last two years, I find there is no real point in this. My best is to do the thing I can do here better than anyone else, which is to contribute experience, and hope that some of it approaches wisdom. My worst role would be to try to take on opportunities that younger men could use to advance themselves, and that under any circumstances they can do about as well as I can. My President, Dr. Aklilu, is a good case in point. He was born the year I finished Columba, which puts him in a time position to have been my son. He is quite a remarkable person with the unusual combination of force and sensitivity. If he doesn't get drawn off into politics to prop up this rather shaky government, I think he will make his mark as one of the world's great educators over the next decade, and I think he will do it in the same way you have, by understanding that education is above all other things the understanding of the uses of service, and the purposes of achievement. Working with such a man, who still has his best years ahead, is a great reconciler, and I count myself fortunate to have had this kind of opportunity at the closing of the daily-active part of my career.

The last year has been frantically busy. My skills in the handling of meetings, and the drafting of documents are in short supply in this university, and I have been worked overtime in the use of them both. We have also had a difficult heritage of distrust to get over in which faculty, students, administration, government, and general public all distrust each other, and usually with good reason. The President and I have whittled away at this and make some progress, but Heaven knows, it is slow. The Emperor is a wonderful example of what an old man can do, but he is also an example of what an old man cannot do, and the greatest of the things he cannot do is to breathe new life into old institutions, and to continue to try to create new patterns, by micro-changes in the old ones. I feel he knows it, and has long since ceased to make any tries for new ideas or accomplishments, being content if the older ones still work without

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too much public creaking and groaning.

We have enjoyed living in Ethiopia, though I am impatient with the confining nature of my job which has kept us from seeing much of the country. My old son is working on his doctorate in Anthropology at Harvard, and should get it this year. Our daughter had her first baby last fall, a daughter whom we saw briefly in Athens last fall, having accompanied her parents in a visit of display to her father's relatives. Our youngest, Mason, now 11, accompanied me on a cycling trip in England last summer, which was a success, but would have been a greater one if we had had more time for it. In fact it was so much a success that we are planning to try it this summer in France, or if I can achieve, the tactful persuasion, Spain, which I think I will prefer.

We will be here at least one more year, though my two academic years as Academic Vice-President expire in July, and I shall be glad to see them finished, even though I know I will probably never hold another administrative post.

If our present plans to terminate here in about a year are actually carried out, we shall also plan to make our way home via the eastward route, including Australia and New Zealand which we have never seen, and another visit to Japan and India, and hopefully Russia. If life continues to smile on us both, we shall surely see you then.

Frances joins me in sending our warm good wishes for the remaining 11 months of the New Year.

*Sincerely*  
*Frank Bowles*