

Oct. 8, 1959

Dear ZK:

I have yours of Sept 30 and I hasten to express Viola's and my sympathy at the passing of your mother. From our long talks about her in the days of your boyhood I almost feel as though I knew her. She must have been a very remarkable woman. You are lucky to have had her around so long. Most of us lose this link to life much earlier, much too early.

I write also to express a kind of impotent anger at the grim dilemma which now offers itself to you over the matter of your tenure at Fort Hare. Obviously dismissal, painful as it might be, would be an "easier" issue for you than this one, where you must yourself make the choice. Even if I knew more fully than I do how you weigh all the elements involved in this choice, I would hesitate greatly before offering advice as to your course. Who has this wisdom for another?

The question really comes down to the alternatives. If it is to be a decision to "get out", the question is, get out to where? The most I can do is to do my damndest to produce one answer at least to that question here in the US and thus offer you something to weigh in the scales, and to do with, if possible, well within the 90-day limit that now hangs over you.

As I have indicated before, the only practicable form in which this might turn up would be a limited one-year invitation to do a course of lectures at some appropriate institution, with a further backstop of a tour of the country to speak before appropriate groups, providing hopefully an additional source of important income. This is a different matter from a job that would offer some greater degree of permanence and provide any more substantial counterweight to the loss of that pension. On the other hand, it offers a year's opportunity to see what might develop along these lines here. At present I am trying to seek out the possibilities of invitations at a number of places; I have some reactions of considerable interest, some nibbles but not yet a firm bite.

Next week in NY I will attempt to explore with other friends a somewhat different approach to the situation: to see if funds could be gotten (from Phelps-Stokes for example) to invite you here on a firm basis at once, and then thereafter see what kind of a program could be worked up for you. Such an invitation would presumably provide travel funds and some maintenance for a given period, 6 months or so I suppose.

This is all, as you see, unavoidably still "iffy". None of it offers a firm longer-term answer to your problem, only an opportunity to find one. But assuming I can within a short period turn these "ifs" into something specific, it at least offers a concrete immediate alternative to accepting the situation that is offered to you there. I can only add to this that it is inconceivable to me that some chance would not offer itself to give you a fruitful and useful job to do here should you decide to come over, and find it possible to do so.

You can count on me personally to do whatever lies in my power to be of assistance. I will write again shortly as soon as I can report any definite result of the immediate effort.

my respects to Frieda.

hri

[Harold R. Isaacs]