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YALE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

DHS 0401R  
British Museum  
Microfilm

WALLACE NOTESTEIN

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT  
19 January 1937

Mr. Raymond B. Fosdick  
The Rockefeller Foundation  
61 Broadway  
New York City

My dear Mr. Fosdick:-

I am writing at the suggestion of Dr. George E. Vincent with whom I have discussed the matter presented below.

This last September when I left the British Museum, Mr. Bell, the head of the Manuscripts Room, said to me that he hoped the manuscripts would still be there when I returned. The past summer I had occasion to see a good many historical friends and archivists. I found them all gloomy about the prospects of war. It is possible that when a war breaks out the first indication of it will be an enormous air raid on London, which might do away with the manuscripts in the British Museum before the authorities had time to hide them away in an underground. It will be remembered that the Four Courts Rebellion in Dublin in April of 1917 resulted in a fire that burned up at one time a very considerable part of the manuscript materials of Irish history.

Fortunately the manuscripts of British history are not all in the same place. The Public Record Office contains as large a collection as the British Museum, probably a larger collection. The Bodley contains much. In scores of country houses there are sizable collections of manuscripts.

This letter is a plea that the manuscripts in the British Museum be filmed, and the films deposited in the Library of Congress. It would be easier to persuade the authorities of the British Museum to allow this than those of any other repository. They are worried about their collections and they are more progressive than the authorities of any other British collection. If the British Museum manuscripts were all in film, the students of English history could sleep in their beds at night, knowing that there was a great body of material for English history still available.

This project is not a large one, rather a limited one. It seems to me to have so much to be said for it that I need to say little. If the project succeeded, it might lead to filming the Public Record Office, the Bodley, and eventually the stores of manuscripts in country houses. The last would be a consummation devoutly to be wished. Every year a country house or two with manuscripts burns up.



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But the first thing would be to film the British Museum manuscripts. There would be little opposition there, if any. I have reason to believe that the head of the Manuscripts Room and Sir George Hill, the Director who retired last summer, would both be pleased at the idea. If the thing were done and done well, with all the proper courtesies (and with no public statement about the dangers from war to the British Museum), and the project publicized at the proper time in a tactful way, it would not do any damage to relations between the United States and Britain.

I enclose some memoranda on the subject.

I am, Sir,

Sincerely yours,

*Wallace Notestein*