

Methodist Girls' High School, Nanking
October 19, 1939

Dear Family:

The melancholy days have come, ~~has~~ of that there is no doubt.
Too warm to have the furnace fire, too cold to go without.
Besides coal is one hundred twenty dollars a tone and scarce at that, so
what chance have we to have a fire just because we are uncomfortable.
Wait till the chilblains come, then we will know it is cold.

I have an opportunity to send some letters to Shanghai to be mailed on the American boat and since I have some American stamps, it is a good opportunity to save a few pennies. That is the reason for this burst of language. Beside on the last mail, I got two packages, and four letters, one from each of my three sisters and my honorable father. Really what more could I ask of life than that. I have a new dress and five pairs of new stockings, best M. W. quality. In a burst of generosity I gave two pairs and a half old ones to the old woman servant and she said she hoped my other sister would send me some more so that she could further profit. Very disrespectful she is to me, but she laughs at my attempts at jokes in Chinese so I think that is enough to ask of her.

The local excitement in this neighborhood last week was that a beggar died on the streets. Between here and the church where I go to teach every day there is a narrow passage way about five feet wide. As I went through it at my usual pace, I noticed lying against the wall a figure covered with matting, such as the Chinese use on their beds. I looked more carefully and could see that it was a dead man. ~~When~~ Three little girls came along just behind me each one with a teakettle on the way to buy some hot water, and when they saw what it was, they became very excited and started to run past me. When I came back, there were people gathered at the end of the alley, so I asked what it was and they told me it was a poor beggar who had died there during the night. The police had come and covered him up, and the neighborhood was taking up a collection to bury him. This was partly to do "good deeds" to acquire merit according to their Buddhist ideas, partly I suspect to get his spirit away. We have been trying to find out what the cheapest coffin would cost but authorities disagree, some say as low as eight or ten dollars others say not less than twenty-some dollars. This is not a desperately poor neighborhood, but they are far from being rich too.

Nov. 15th. 1939

Dear Ruth:

Well, I'll let you come at the head of the list for a special letter although I'm not sure what I shall say to you. I always begin by rereading your last letter and using that as a starting point. I suppose it makes writing less mechanical, and more like conversation.

You know by my other letter that the money order was o. k. In this case it happened to get a better rate of exchange because by the time I could have gotten a check back to Shanghai, the rate would have fallen below that allowed on the money order. Usually however one does better with a check. I just deposit it in my bank and they collect it for me and exchange it. I have used my own personal check and I think another time it would be all right to do that too. You must have had to pay quite a lot for that money order didn't you?

I wish however that you would not send me money and try to keep Dad from doing so. I have enough to get along on. It means I am going without some things which I would like to have, but that doesn't matter. I know that Dad likes to give money and so I won't say anything, but even postage I can manage all right.

I am getting an outfit of Chinese clothes but when I get stocked up, they will do me the rest of my term out here. I finally had the fur coat made over, with a dark blue serge cover. It is not so pretty as the red but more appropriate I suppose. Anyhow when I wear Chinese clothes I like them inconspicuous. I'm also having some knitted pants made. I already have one pair, but these new ones are of softer yarn and will be more comfortable I hope so that I will be willing to wear them. I've decided that with my neuritis, I have got to dress rather more warmly than I have in the past. I've been wearing my padded coat these days when it is not quite cold enough to have a fire and I have managed to escape the cold which I always seem to get every autumn. Everyone makes fun of me for wearing it because they say it is not cold enough for it. Even the Chinese do not wear padded clothes yet. The temp. hovers around sixty.

Now that I am in children's work, I am getting acquainted with the children of the neighborhood and they are all quite friendly to me. Today as I went over to the church they ran after me yelling, so I stopped and talked to them a minute and then one little girl named "Little Devil" ran behind me and I put my hand behind and she grabbed it and tried to pull me back. I wish I could do more for them. They are small under six or seven. I don't want to give them things because I don't want them always begging. They are not desperately poor, as they are well fed and warmly dressed, but are not being sent to school. Lower middle class families, you know.

Prices are dreadfully high this winter so that there is sure to be a lot of suffering. Fuel is many times its normal price. Charcoal is six or seven times, and even grass or hay is three or four times. Coal is now \$154 a ton. Before the war, it was about \$28, and last summer when we bought 70-85 a ton. When the coal we have is gone, we will have to do without. We have started the stove in the dining room, but except for the bathroom have not had fires elsewhere. It if should be a cold winter,

If it should be a cold winter, we may need it before the weather warms up again. I figure we need it more in the spring when we are used to a fire than we do now when we have had the cold come on gradually.

But for the very poor, it is a matter of getting fuel for cooking. How they are going to survive is a question. So many things which are really necessities to them have doubled or more in price.

I don't feel much like writing to today but will get this off. I led the mission prayer meeting last night and the school chapel this morning and so now I am ready to go off and get drunk. I know you don't feel that way after such an attempt but I always do.

Hoping you are the same,

Lovingly, Jessie