

40 Hwang Li Hsiang, Nanking, Aug. 18, 1940

Dear Friends:

I am writing this from Chinkiang, a nearby mission station where I have come for a week's rest. This has been a very hot summer and it has been difficult for me to get away for any length of time. I am new on the job and in addition, I have two new workers to help get started, one a day school supervisor, and the other an evangelistic worker. The result has been that I have been needed at home and have not had a chance to get away for long. It has been unusually dry this summer, so much so that the rice crop is expected to be far below normal, and the hot spells have been longer with fewer cool days because of rain. Usually there are typhoons that come every week or two which have the effect of cooling us off (beside blowing down trees and such) but this year there have been none at all.

I have planned for the new evangelistic worker to take charge of what we call a half day school, that is a school in the afternoon for women who have not had much opportunity for education. It is really an adult education project. She has recently graduated from the Bible Teachers' Training School, but previous to entering that school, she worked as a day school teacher and was at one time in charge of a half day school in a country station. In the morning in the same building we have a school for poor children. There is in addition a regular primary school with about three hundred students. In the church itself, is still another school, upper primary and junior high school, but I have no special responsibility for that. I shall teach a little English conversation for the sake of getting acquainted with the students.

I hope to spend a major part of my time with the evangelistic work with women. We have a weekly meeting with them on Wednesday afternoon, usually with from fifty to a hundred women. We have also a number of "Home" classes, that is, groups which meet weekly to learn to read, mostly old women. They enjoy getting together and of course learn a few new words. Mrs. Yeh, the old Bible woman is in charge of them and attends them every week. When the weather gets cold, we open a bath house, where women can get a bath for a few cents. There are public bathhouses where men may go, but none for women, and those in poor homes have no facilities in cold weather for bathing.

As there are many poor people among our church members, we have also had some industrial work. It has been very difficult to manage and to find work for them to do so that they can earn a little. We have to compete with sweatshop prices if we sell something that is used locally. I'm a little uncertain as to just how I shall manage this. I'm considering having them make dolls to sell in U.S.A. I've been experimenting more or less all summer trying to evolve a doll which I could sell for less than ten cents, U.S. money. And still be cute. Because of exchange that is not so impossible as it seems, since ten cents American money is between ~~four~~ a dollar and a half to two dollars in local money. I could put fifty cents worth of work on each doll and still have something left for postage and material. They would be dressed in Chinese costumes, and I hope would be little messengers of good will to Standard Bearers and others. I have decided that the optimum length is about six inches. Smaller than that is too hard to make, and larger takes too much material. But they are still in the process of evolution. If I am successful, I may send you one as a sample. This is a sort of a gamble, or a venture of faith, on my part, for I must finance it myself, either out of my own money or out of personal gifts. But if a satisfactory doll could be produced, I believe that the scheme has possibilities. I would not hope to make a profit, but just to cover cost of material and labor, so that we could give these poor women a little help to tide them over these difficult days.

Last night, the two of us slept outdoor in the bright moonlight. We had mosquito nets over the beds, and it was really the first comfortable and restful night I've had for a long time. We got up at daylight and came in. I was really a little bit cold, but the house was still hot and stuffy so that I got up about seven o'clock rather than lie in bed and sweat. But I felt so much more refreshed than I usually do after sweltering all night.

Page two is three days later than page one, but the writer is much more relaxed and rested, so here's hoping that the delay is all for the good. I have now slept three nights out of doors in the moonlight and very refreshing ones they were too. In the morning I stretch out in a long chair under the trees and look at the roofs of the city in the valley and the yellow waters of the Yangtse in the distance and feast my soul on quiet. I've been so busy these last two months that I realize how much I need to stop and take stock and to remember from whence is my source of strength.

I spent some time this spring calling with the Bible women in the homes of the church members. There is something I suppose about the very poor that is very touching. Their willingness to share with those more needy than themselves, their appreciation of the little that one can do for them. It is impossible to describe their homes, crowded, dirty and barren of even the simplest comforts. And yet they welcomed us as if to a palace.

All of the churches in the city were given money to open a class for very poor children, who because of the high cost of living weren't getting enough to eat. They were given a good meal, all they could eat and kept for a couple of hours in which they were taught songs, told stories, etc. There were about a hundred in the group which our church took care of. The teaching was all volunteer work, done by the young people and church members, taking turn and turn about.

Economic conditions are always bad out here but they were many times worse now because of the fall in the value of the local currency. There are many unemployed and many whose income has not risen. Prices on the necessities of life have risen many times. Rice, their usual staple of diet is out of sight and difficult to get at any price. Usually it sells for six to ten dollars, but this year the price has ranged from twenty-five to eighty. Fuel, oil, meat, and everything have risen to four or five their normal value. The burden falls especially on the families with children. There has been a little relief money available, but it is difficult to know how to dispense it.

I am afraid that my friends will feel that they are getting more than their share of my problems when I change jobs like this. Things that to a more experienced worker would be taken as a matter of fact, stand up like huge mountains to me. But I am greatly thrilled by the fact that I am at last in this kind of work for I feel that it is going to be very rewarding. I have been deeply touched by the needs of these women, spiritual and physical, and at the same time am overwhelmed by the sense of my inability to do much for them. But over and over again I have had the wonderful experience of somehow finding courage in the midst of discouraging circumstances. I got a bad feeling that the burden is more than I can carry, and I wake up the next morning to find that the strength has been given for another day. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." I know that you remember to pray for me, and I hope you will especially not forget to do so during the next few months when I am taking over the responsibility for this new work.

This is a borrowed typewriter, much better than my old Remington, but somehow not so well adjusted to my touch. At least there seem to be more than the usual number of mistakers. Anyhow, let that be my alibi, it is as good as any.

With love, Jeesie