

40 Hwang Li Hsiang, Nanking, Jan. 2, 1941

Dear Friends:

I suppose that aside from Santa Claus (with whom I would not presume to compare myself) I am probably the most "christmas-ed" person in town if not in the world. I find that between Dec. 19th and 28th, I celebrated fifteen times.

Every Thursday we have a special meeting for women. The one just before Christmas, the 19th, I invited the Half Day School to prepare a Christmas play for the women. They choose a Chinese version of Dickens Christmas Carol. I never see a play in China but that I do not reproach myself that I don't plan for more of them for they are certainly a very effective teaching medium. The audience was so sympathetic and appreciative that it did not seem to matter that it was done almost without scenery and costumes. We had planned as a Christmas treat for the women, some sweet steamed rolls, filled in the center with brown sugar and a sort of sweet bean paste. We had such a large attendance that day that the refreshments had to be spread quite a bit thinner than we had planned. However I think everyone went away happy. The young women in the Half Day School had the experience of working together and successfully putting on a project, and I believe derived a great deal of satisfaction and benefit from their own efforts.

The next morning the church kindergarten had a special Christmas. Three little wisemen, rather weirdly clothed in bright colors presented their gifts to the manger baby. A third little one dressed as Santa Claus helped to distribute little packages of sweets.

In the afternoon, the mothers' Club and Cradle Roll had their party. I tried to count the number of babies present, but gave it up after the third attempt because they didn't hold still long enough. The principal thing on the program was a Christmas story, to be told by one of their members, but for some reason right at the last moment the woman was unable to come. It was due to the death of her older sister, I learned later. However they had a nice time even with the shorter program. The president asked each one to tell what she was thankful for during the year, and one after another, told of small blessings that had come to them, of anxious hours when the baby was sick, when the mother had prayed for ~~help~~ help and found the comfort and strength that she needed. Small gifts were given to each child there, as well as a little package of sweets. The mothers were served tea and refreshments. There were about thirty-five children and sixty adults there, since that was the number prepared for and there was none left.

On Saturday there were two School Christmases. The first one was in what we call a "Poor-people's school", a school for poor children which is held only half a day. The building is used in the afternoon for a similar school for adults, which we call the Women's Half Day School. These children on Saturday morning have a little worship service, somewhat like a Junior League, and as this was Saturday morning, they took charge of the Christmas celebration. A little boy was chairman, in fact everything was done by the children themselves, except that a teacher played the organ. There were all the usual features of a Christmas program, songs, little drills, reciting of scripture, and finally a little play, in which one child explained to another child the meaning of Christmas. In the process, a blind man comes in begging, so he is politely invited to have a chair and rest a while, and taught to sing a Christian hymn, and finally given two little packages of food, one for himself and one for him to share with others. The play was written by one of the teachers.

They were then given little packages of cookies and candy and peanuts, and sent home. The teacher's principles were put to a real test while the children were marching out when a real beggar wandered in and demanded some help. She gave her a package of the sweets such as had been prepared for the children, omitting to try to teach the old woman to sing as the little boy had done in the play.

The other school was a regular primary day school in which there are more than two hundred children. Their program was very nice too. The Chinese have a form of interpretive dancing of which they were very fond. I was very much embarrassed to see two such performers appear in two of my old summer wash dresses, rather ordinary American prints, but to Chinese eyes rather pretty. The question is now whether these dresses are appropriate for a staid old missionary to wear, since they seemed to be very satisfactory dresses for two little butterflies to flit about in.

The next morning, this school has a special Sunday School, and at that time they were given their treat. Like American children, many more attend Sunday School at Christmas time than ordinary times.

That morning in church, I was much surprised to have a young Russian girl come in and sit down beside me. Her story was this. Her home was in Peking but she had gone to Shanghai three weeks before to look for her sixteen year old younger brother who had run away from home. She had started out with two hundred dollars, and when she left Shanghai, she still had about eighty-five. On the train the day before, she had put this money into her suitcase for safe keeping and some time during the day someone had stolen it, so that she was (according to her story) left without any money except for a little in her purse. She had gone to a Chinese hotel the night before and the next morning, had started out to look for an "American" church. I could not understand how she got to Wesley church for it is about as far from the station as it is possible to be. I had no way of checking on her story and I did not know what to do with her. I did just what you would have done. I took her home with me for dinner and talked with her. She told me that she was really an Austrian, that her father had left Austria in 1914 to escape military service and come to Harbin in Manchuria. As a small child she was adopted by a Russian family so that she had a Russian name, was a Greek Catholic by religion. My guess was that her story was not exactly true as she told it. She was a dancer by profession, she said, and I suspect that she had gone to Shanghai to look for work, ending up with only enough money to get to Nanking. I gave her some clothes since she was not dressed warmly enough for a two days journey on an unheated train in December, an old sweater and skirt and old padded bathrobe. We also gave her fifty dollar (my housemate and I) and sent her on her way with our blessing, telling her to come back if she ran into trouble again. I made her pin her money into her clothes this time. She promised to return the money to us as soon as she got home but we will probably never see it for even if her story was true and she actually went to Peking, it would take a while to get that much together again. So we probably will never know whether we were merely easy-marks or really helped a sister in distress.

Sunday afternoon, the Epworth League had a special Christmas service, and Monday morning, the children from all the schools which center about our church had a joint service. In addition to the ones I have already mentioned, was the Junior high from the church. Everything went very nicely considering that there were not enough seats so that the children were packed into the pews until they could hardly wriggle.

Monday afternoon, I invited the teachers of these schools, the pastors and other workers to my house for a party.

It was a cold rainy day but everyone came except two or three. There were about thirty-five altogether. We played games and then I served what the English would call a "high" tea, that is quite a lot to eat but something less than a real meal. Of all the things that we make, which the Chinese like, the first thing seems to be our bread, so I had first buns with meatloaf filling, then rolls with jelly in them, cake, candy, peanuts and an apple for each one. I don't think any of them were able to eat supper. I intended that they should have enough. Because of the high prices, their diet is short on meat and sweets and fruit.

Tuesday morning, (24th) was free, but I made up for it with two parties in the afternoon. We have five study classes in which women from a neighborhood meet together once a week to learn to read. I went to the first one of these on Tuesday in a Chinese house. There were about ten people there, women I should say. After that was over, Mrs. Yeh (the old Bible woman) and I went to the Half Day School party. They were playing games when we arrived and having a very hilarious time. This school was opened this fall, having been closed since the war. There are about thirty students, girls above fifteen and women and in these few months they have attained to a very fine spirit of unity. There is no group of students who appreciate their opportunity to study as much as this one. They are in charge of a young Bible School graduate, Alice Tzou who is very enthusiastic about them.

About this time, I got the happy idea of inviting the ~~four~~ other four home's classes to my house for a real party. Hardened as I was, you see, the Christmas spirit was sort of getting me. I asked the Bible woman what she thought of that, and she at once assured me that they would love to come to a foreign house, since many had never seen one. I suggested first since one group lived so far away that we have them in the church but she assured me that they would rather walk the longer distance and come to my house. There were too many for having all four classes on one day, so we invited the Wednesday and Friday classes for Friday, and the Saturday and Monday classes to come together on Saturday. Each day there were about thirty-five women, about as many as I had chairs for. I had prepared a little talk on the meaning of Christmas, but I suddenly decided that what they needed more than listening to my doctrine was to laugh and have a good time, and so I shortened my remarks to a few sentences and invited them to play games. The Bible woman was just not too strict about limiting the attendance to regular attendants of the classes so that in the two days there were most of the regular attendants of our church, that is women, and as one fat old lady said, she laughed so much at the games that she really hurt. Most of them were poor folk many of them very poor (everyone is poor now). These two parties were sort of a fitting climax to come at the end. They carefully wrapped up the refreshments in their handkerchiefs and took them home instead of eating. They drank large quantities of tea. Then they wanted to look at my house, which one old lady told me was just like heaven after which she piously added, "Thanks to the grace of God."

I see that I have omitted Christmas day altogether. Miss Search, my housemate and I were invited out to dinner to the Stewards, a missionary family. Mrs. Steward was preparing to take her two small children home to America so the party was tinged with sadness knowing that we were soon to see a family divided by an ocean. In the afternoon there was a union musical service of all the churches in the city in the big Presbyterian church, afterward Mrs. Sone invited the Wesley choir to her house for a farewell tea, since she too was having to evacuate. The choir pledged to her that they would be faithful during her absence, and for the first rehearsal at least after she had gone kept their promise by appearing at Choir practice Saturday afternoon. Unfortunately there is no one to take her place but me and as I never sang in a choir in my life, my support is moral rather than musical!

40 Hwang Li Ssiang, Nanking
February 11, 1941

Dear Friends:

I am going to send this letter via the President Coolidge which leaves Shanghai on Feb 25th, with American postage. I am writing early because I do not know whether I will have time later to get a letter in. If I don't get personal notes added to this, I will send them later, when I hope I will have more time.

My Christmas mail was very late this year, some of it getting here only this week. But it was most satisfactory to know that so many of my friends had enough imagination to know that I would still be out here and would greatly enjoy a letter.

When the Coolidge sails next week, our Methodist group in this conference will lose three more, Misses Nagler, Joy Smith, and Lulu Golisch, and Edith Youtsey, four I mean. It is going to be a regular Central China Conference boat. That leaves no woman worker in Wuhu, Clara Bell Smith in Chinkiang, and three of us in Nanking. Harriet Whitmer at Ginling College, Blanche Search, who really belongs to Kiangsi conference in the Bible School, and myself in general work. There are in Nanking, two G.B. missionaries, one a doctor, and the other connected with the University.

As for my future plans, I'm still unable to tell you anything very definite. I hope if the worst comes to go into "Free" China, possibly to West China, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to get there, so that in the end I may also have to come home. I hope it will not be necessary for I have been back only two years and would prefer staying out here a little longer if it were at all possible.

I thought for a while of a plan of going inland into Anhwei, settling somewhere far enough away to be safe from bombs, but still in this general neighborhood. Two members of the Christian Adventist Mission have done that. When I was in Wuhu I considered it, and tried to get all the information I could. It seemed to me to be a not impossible possibility. (That sounds almost like Rheinhold Neibuhr.) However as the things stand now, there is no one who can go with me, and it does not seem wise to try it alone. I would enjoy doing it, if I have to leave here.

Therefore as things stand now, I am going to stay on here for the present. If nothing happens, I'll be here, and if something comes, I'll hope that there will be an opportunity to get away somewhere, and if there is none, I suppose I shall just have to take what comes. After all, I am not the first who has had to stand up against a difficult situation, and my experience is that somehow one always has the strength to meet what one has to meet.

However if war comes, and you do not hear from me, don't jump to any nasty conclusions that I am in an internment camp. There are a number of other possibilities. One is that I could hide somewhere in the city. Several Chinese have intimated to me that they are thinking of that possibility for me. Another is that I might start on a thousand mile walk or so to West China. I'm not so young as I once was, and don't make the same speed as I once was famous for, but I still can go at a pretty good rate. Perhaps on a bicycle. The third possibility and probably the most likely one is that pressure will be put on us by the American Government to leave, and we will probably obey.

Our missionary group is sadly depleted. There are three Presbyterian ladies, one doctor and one general missionary, beside Mrs. Thurston at Ginling College. Miss Bauer and Miss Hind in the hospital, Mr. and Mrs. Matti in the Friend's mission, Mr. and Mrs. MacCallum in the Christian Mission, and Mr. Forster in the Episcopal. There is also Mr. Sone, S. M. E. who is however due soon for