

(Excerpts from letters of Jessie Wolcott, Nanking, China)

(Dec. 13, 1939)

I had a party last night for my Sunday School teachers, there were 24 of them, past and present teachers, and we ate "mein" (noodles) and played games and had a Santa Claus or a Chinese version of one. I asked the principal of the primary school to perform that job. He is an old man about sixty five but he was very funny and added a lot to the occasion. We gave each one a little pocket diary and a calendar. He presented each one with quite a flourish. He pranced around as only a Chinese actor can.

(Nov. 15, 1939)

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 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 it was \$70 to \$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. 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.

(March 28, 1940)

I had a little excitement this morning, the meaning of which I don't know. Before I got down to breakfast the cook called me to say that some policemen wanted to see me. When I got down they told me that there were some shells on the ground outside my gate. It was really the gate leading into the house next door, the "Bishop's" house which is now empty, the gate leading into the garage. I went out to look and found just as they said, several, eight or ten, brass shells about a half inch in diameter and three or four inches long. They looked as if they were unexploded and were dirty and corroded as if they had been lying about for a couple of years. Neither they nor the servants had any idea where they had come from. They were very polite (the police) and asked me to tell them if a thief had been in the house and taken anything. But nothing was missing and I investigated the house next door without finding any trace of it having been disturbed. My cook is also caretaker for that house. I reported the matter to the consul however, just in case it has more significance than it appears to have. I think someone picked up those shells and has kept them for two years and decided to get rid of them, and picked that little niche in the wall by that gateway to put them where they would not be stepped on.

I don't worry about myself in a case like this, but it might be a plant to involve some of the Chinese connected with the mission, my cook for instance. He may be engaged in subversive activities, but I doubt it.

Anyhow, if you think I'm not enterprising, what do you know about my getting chilblains on Good Friday after not having had them all winter. Just one toe was affected and I have to sleep with my foot sticking out to keep it cool, change my shoes, as often as I get one pair warmed up. It looks like a burn.

(June 19, 1940)

I have been back from Wuhu for more than a week. As the little boys said, I am so glad to get home that I am glad I went. It seems to me that one's own house is much more comfortable in uncomfortable weather than some one else's house. Anyhow, when I go away from home, I have another difficulty. I suppose it was my P. K. training, but my appetite suddenly increases to such proportions that I have difficulty getting enough to eat. My cook is better than most, and yet he can hardly tempt me to eat, and away from home, I have to consume large quantities of bread and butter to stave off starvation. It is most embarrassing.

One night last week, I was awakened by the most terrible racket in the front yard. I could hear the cook screaming and it sounded as if some one was trying to break down the gate. I was so scared that I almost jumped out of the window and climbed a tree. I could not imagine what it was. But a few minutes of listening revealed to me that the servants had caught a thief and were beating him with a bamboo pole which made a dreadful noise. The poor wretch was begging for mercy and promising never to do it again, so they let him go. The cook told me that a thief had annoyed them a great deal by stealing any little thing they left outside. He saw him go past his window and chased him and as he was climbing over the gate, knocked him off with a bamboo pole and then beat him good and hard. They were threatening to beat him to death when I woke up, but I guess he won't come back again soon.

The cook is a very mild, proper little man, and he was as proud the next morning as a cat is which has caught a rat. We are going to have the gate fixed so that it will not be so easy to climb over.

I went over to see the poor children's school yesterday and saw some thing very cute. A couple of kids tried to bootleg in a little brother. Each child brought a bowl for rice and another for the vegetable which they eat. Two kids sat in a seat and we noticed that one had a little brother sitting beside him, a little big headed kid who looked like "Henry" in the funny pictures. They put all the vegetable in one bowl, and used the extra bowl to put rice in and pulled out another pair of chopsticks from the desk and soon all were eating merrily. It was just like the Henry pictures. The lady in charge suggested that if they brought the little brother tomorrow, they would all be sent home. Poor little waifs, it was hard to be severe; but they have more than a hundred and planning on weeding out a few of the more prosperous looking ones.

Rice is above fifty dollars now. The weather has been very dry this spring and there is not water enough to flood the fields, and if there is not a heavy rain soon, this district is in for a hard year. There has been a drouth in Japan this year, but there was a bumper crop here last year. If there is a drouth in both countries, it is hard to imagine what the result will be.

I'm having a brainstorm about my industrial work. My latest idea is to have these poor women make Chinese dolls, "rag" ones, with Chinese costumes. Sell them in U. S. A. My idea was to make them to sell for ten cents gold, and I'm still in the process of working out the plan. The material runs up quite high and postage is a lot, so I don't know if it is workable or not. Anyhow, I haven't as yet succeeded in getting a pattern which is satisfactory, nor someone to paint the faces, etc. But several are working on it, and perhaps something will come of it. I gave money to those who have been getting this work as I will not be ready to start it, if at all, for another month. With rice at \$50, they couldn't wait.

(October 2, 1940)

Last week Friday and Saturday there was a special meeting under the auspices of a special committee called the National Christian Homes Committee. Each church sent delegates and is supposed to put on a Christian Homes program of some sort. One day we learned to cook. Because of the high price of rice, the Chinese in this part of the country are being forced to eat more flour products, and since they do not know how to cook them, they are having to learn from the Northern Chinese who live largely on flour made things. So that day we learned to make some common flour things. I got my hand in it too, just to see if it was difficult and found that it was not. We are going to invite for our church some northern women to teach the women in our church how to make some of their steamed bread and other things. The northerners say that they can eat wheat for a hundred days and not have the same thing twice. The people here only know how to make three or four different dishes. I shall buy materials for them and at our midweek meeting have a cooking class. It will have to be October 17th in case you are interested.

We also have what we call "Homes" classes, really neighborhood classes, and the past week I have been attending them in a sort of opening of school exercise. We bought a little tea for them and had a little program. It ran into three weeks before I got to all faces of them because of the Mid-autumn festival and some other things which conflicted. There are between ten and fifteen in each class. I think they have a good time and they are learning to read a little slowly it seems to me. If we could put some really good teachers in them, they could be made quite worthwhile. The only group that had gotten past the first two books was the one which had a Bible school graduate in charge of it. Some of them are still in the first book. The Bible woman, Mrs. Yeh attends them all and keeps them going pretty much. She goes out and rounds up the students. If someone is not there she goes and finds out why, and if there is no good reason, she makes them come.

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Easter week was a very busy one. I went to two good Friday services, one at my own church and in the afternoon another one down at the big Episcopal church in South City. The latter was a union service with people from all the churches attending. Both were very nice. We were especially pleased with our own service because of the number present and the quietness and orderliness of the service. Easter Sunday it rained, but there was a good congregation nevertheless.

Monday afternoon there was another union service in the Presbyterian church across the street from me here, mostly music in which the different choirs of the city took part in a couple of joint numbers. Our choir bring one of the better ones was invited to give a special number. After that was over, Marie and I invited them over to my house for tea. We planned on forty but I think we had less than that, but there were a few

extras dropped in who just happened to be in this part of the city and thought they would take the occasion to call on me in my new house. I thought we would never get the singers filled up and they kept at it until everything was gone. I think they had enough. Fortunately nothing was left over. I made Marie promise to eat up anything that was left and so she made the boys eat it for her. After it was all over, they played games until six o'clock and a good time was had by all.

Another piece of news is that I have succeeded in making friends with the cook's little girl. She is about three and at first cried every time she saw me (not that I blame her for that) but I suppose in time even a baby gets used to my looks, and suddenly she decided she would be friends. I don't understand why unless she felt that her baby sister (about nine months old) was getting too much attention. She is very cute. I suspect she is borading with me for she is always in the kitchen at mealtimes and eats the scraps. She follows her father around and says "bah-bah" to him.

I have decided that in lots of ways working with children was good preparation for this job for while it consists in part of children's work, the adult work is mostly with illiterate women, or women of little education. I prepared a story for junior church and I believe that it will also appeal to the woman's meeting at which I am also scheduled to speak within a few days. But I have been just a little puzzled as to what to say to them. They are more patient than students, with whom of course I am accustomed to deal, but less hopeful, less spontaneous. I think that one would talk more about strength to endure the present state of society than about building a new society. When your children are not getting enough to eat, it seems to me that it would be rather futile to urge people to take the long view and know that in the end something better will come. Maybe I am mistaken.

Speaking of Chinese humor, I was talking to the Chinese girl who is going with us to the country, and she said that we were to bring out own bedding because they had written in that the bedding that one could rent was too dirty and full of bugs. After a minute she started to laugh and for a while wouldn't tell me what amused her. Finally she said, "I happened to think that if the bugs got in your hair, they could live in your curls and have a foreign style house."

At the prayer meeting this morning, the pastor read the story in Acts in which Peter said to the lame man "Silver and Gold have I none, but such as I have I give unto you." He remarked upon the fact that when he went out of church in the morning, he was conscious that the people who surrounded him were so many of them seeking after some sort of help, relief, or some other material help. He reminded us of the rule that the church had made that no relief was to be given on Sunday, if they wanted to come for help, they were to come some other day.

They he went on to say that he also could say that he had no material benefit to bestow, that he had no money and was himself dependent on the support of his work. I thought how much better it would be if we were all like him, that is I mean since everyone can't be as we are.

I have had an interesting time the last couple of days, going to some "home" classes. These are classes where the women of a neighborhood meet once a week to learn to read. They are a part of Marie's program. I have

never been in Chinese homes enough but that they are still very interesting to me. Each class had about fifteen in it and I think they had a good time although their progress at learning to read is of course nothing phenomenal. The leader is some woman who can read and there seemed to be several mixed in who knew considerable and were more or less assistants.

I think the Chinese develop quite a knack of living together. The lady of the house (at Marie's suggestion) shooed out the children who had followed us in from the street and I was amazed at how tactfully she did it.

In the house today there were several courts, each one inhabited by a separate family, and we went through to the very last one, in which lived an old man and his wife, and their daughter-in-law and two small children. The children were very friendly and insisted upon sitting on the same chair with me (by turns) and were very cute.

I'd like to start a bean-milk station at the church like the milk stations at home, except that beanmilk is sold. I mean to train someone to prepare beanmilk so that it would be suitable for small babies to drink and sell it at cost or a little less. Because of poor diet there are a lot of mothers now who ordinarily would be having plenty of milk for their babies, who are having to supplement their feeding.