

Chinkingiang, July 28, 1946

Dear Family:

Sometimes it seems that when you have left too long a space of time elapse between letters that it is just as well to let the whole thing go and start all over again. Two weeks ago (or maybe it was three) Frances Culley of Wuhu appeared in Nanking and wanted me to go to Shanghai with her for a little vacation. As I had gotten to the place where I was not accomplishing very much of anything anyhow, I decided to drop everything and go. The same day I started for Nanking, I got a letter from here asking me to pay them a visit and so I decided to do so on my return trip. We were in Shanghai nearly two weeks, arriving late Friday night and departing on Wednesday morning of the second week. This is now Sunday and I am returning to the old grind tomorrow afternoon.

Shanghai was n't really anything because prices were so terrific that we couldn't do any shopping. The cheapest kind of cloth is about \$2.50 a yard and so I decided that my soul ~~o~~ couldn't have the new dress which it was demanding of me. I don't know why my ~~mam~~ soul thinks a new dress makes any difference to its welfare but that is one of its peculiarities. However I did buy some Japanese printed cotton cloth for a kimono just to prove that the war is really over even though it doesn't seem so at times. I cut it down the middle and sewed it up under the arms and it has the advantage of any perfect kimono that is it is easy to get into. Otherwise it looks like a doll dress. Don't ask me what I look like in it.

We have had very hot muggy weather these two weeks. I did not go to church this morning, instead have been lolling around in bed. The girls offered to serve my breakfast to me in bed. I don't especially appreciate such service but I realize that it is sometimes more convenient for the servants to bring your breakfast up to you and get it over with than to wait for you to dress and come down. So I am still not dressed. Etha and Clara Bell have gone to church so I am home here alone, dressed in a pair of pants and a bright smile. I did have on my doll kimono but decided that was too much. It has been fairly comfortable up here until just now.

The two girls here got here about ~~two~~ a month ago. The compound here is on the top of a hill outside of the city and was formerly a girls' boarding school, so that there are four large buildings beside several smaller residences. They were all occupied by the Japanese as a military hospital during the war and after peace were taken over by the Chinese army and similarly used. After they got here, the Chinese have moved out of all but one building which is still occupied by wounded soldiers. The place was looted bare of furniture, so this big house is furnished like a summer cottage. They have a bridge table and four folding chairs which they brought with them, two canvas deck chairs, and then some seats out of the school auditorium which are more or less intact. There are ~~now~~ also some crude tables which the Japanese left and they use them for all sorts of things. A little of their original furniture has been returned, a few wash stands. Then they have a few borrowed things. The house is in bad condition, the walls are scarred and dirty, the floors worn and scarred. They have already spent a million on repair but that only fixed the screens in the few rooms which they are using, fixed leaks in the roof and a few such necessary repairs.

From my superior experience of six months out here, I was sent for to advise them! They have the money to furnish the house, what would be a good sum in any civilized country, but what will call for extreme economy to even make an impression in this big house. They are a little undecided as to what they want to do or where they want to live and so have done nothing toward refurnishing. The high prices sort of paralyze one at first. If I had only had the sense to stock up on everything that I needed when I first came, I would be money ahead, but I couldn't bring myself to buy anything which I didn't absolutely need at the moment. There is a minimum beyond which you can't get along and sooner or later you break down and buy things at no matter what cost.

Part of the difficulty is the lack of anything to buy. It is impossible to buy good lumber so anything that one has made is unsatisfactory. My own idea is to buy old things and have them refinished. But most of the things available are Chinese style furniture, (not the pretty old fashioned kind) which one would hate to be burdened with for the rest of one's life.

It is really remarkable how some things managed to survive. The house in Shanghai has quite a lot of its original furniture, ~~now~~ the upholstered couch and chairs which are of a quality unobtainable now. Their electric refrigerator, they found in the garage, and with a few minor repairs it was usable. So I fairly drowned myself drinking ice water while I was there. Here they don't even have a bathtub which we do in Nanking with running water. In Shanghai during the hot weather I got to taking cold baths two or three times a day. But even that is a luxury here, so ~~Nanking~~ ~~is~~ ~~seem~~ ~~luxurious~~ after this.

My eyes have been bothering me some so I consulted a doctor in Shanghai, a Chinese one recommended by Shu-liang. He could not find much of anything wrong with the glasses I had so he gave me some new reading glasses to use while working on my accounts and studying Chinese and long time reading. I'm not sure that they are an improvement although I haven't really tried them out. They do magnify better and so I have hopes that they will relieve some of the strain I have been having.

Living in Shanghai now costs \$6000 a day, which is about U.S. \$3 a day. I think this month in Nanking it will be about that much or more. Bessie tried to get someone to cut the grass on her lawn and they wanted 40,000, or about 20 for the job and so she was cutting it herself with a pair of big scissors, working an hour or two every evening after she got home from the office. As I was facing a similar difficulty with my own lawn, I looked around and finally found a Chinese sickle for her, price \$3 for a very crude thing, but with that in her hand the job didn't seem so hopeless because it looked as if she might get the thing done in time to start on the other side again.

China is in its usual condition of crisis. I suppose it wouldn't be China if it weren't. The communists are attacking quite near here, just across the river, so that the city is full of refugees from the war areas. These folks here don't have a newspaper nor a radio so they live quite peacefully in the midst of impending danger. Just as well, I suppose because the worst is always threateningly ~~constant~~ close at hand and yet never quite arriving.

All the Chinese have a sort of a green cricket in a little cage for a pet this time of year and yesterday a preacher's son gave us each a little cage with a pair of crickets in it. We don't know what the proper English name for them ~~is~~ is. They aren't locusts nor cicadas nor grasshoppers although a little like all of them. I don't know if the pair are man and wife, or merely brothers (or possibly sisters). The noise is made by a contraption on their backs which vibrates. I have also acquired a kitten which I have named Pansy. I shall take Pansy and the two grasshopper-crickets with me tomorrow on the train and I shall doubtless arouse considerable interest among my fellow passengers. I had a long talk with Pansy about moving to Nanking and catching my rats and she agreed to it but she may change her mind about riding in a box. Cats are rather hard to get. This one is a little larger than I wish she were as I fear I will have a time making her satisfied, but she is the best I can get at present.

The girls here have some plastic 'glasses'. They are unbreakable, they say. Also cheap. Very ordinary glasses here are about a dollar each. So if you see some of these on sale and feel inclined to send them, they probably would fare better than the glass plates. I wondered about ~~putting~~ piecing out my set of green dishes with them but I understand that they warp if one puts hot things in them. So I guess it isn't such a good idea. So far everyone who has come to live with me has brought a set of dishes and so we have gotten along all right.

Everyone who comes now brings a lot of stuff with them and what it costs them to get them through Shanghai sort of makes one wonder if it is worth the trouble. However when they go to inland places where they can't buy things, I suppose it is just as well. As I listened to all the difficulties and worries they had in Shanghai, I was sort of glad that I escaped it all by getting out here so early that I didn't know enough to bring anything with me.

I think you ought to tie things up better when you send them now. Things are handled very rough now and there is a lot of ~~an~~ thieving. The packages you sent were in very bad condition. It is difficult to say if anything was gone from them as they naturally pack down with time and distance, but I'm afraid there were some losses from them. I suppose the folks that got them also need them, but on good things, I think you ought to be a little more thorough. They say they handle things now with the idea that if they break open and things leak out, so much the better!

I have been reading "The Egg and I" since I got here. It is rather amusing in spots about a couple who went to live on a Chicken farm in the mountains. It has been unfortunate that on these two weeks when I had the leisure to read there was really nothing good available. I read four or five detective stories in Shanghai.

I hear the girls home so I suppose I may as well come to an end. I thought I might not get time to write after I got to Nanking so took this opportunity to dash off a few lines to you. I am covered with a lot of bites, from what insect I am not sure, hard little red spots which itch and fester. I told Frances that respectable people weren't bitten by anything but mosquitoes. The bedbugs in Nanking rather refused to nibble at me, but maybe these here are a hardier variety. I think however that it is a kind of gnat, very tiny so that it goes right through screens and stings one on one's knuckles and elbows and other outlandish places. These hot nights I have been sleeping in the raw as they say and so have got a lot of them in other outlandish places. The things look like tiny warts. Hoping you are the same, lovingly, Jessie