

AMERICAN LUTHERAN MISSION

H. M. NESSE, PASTOR

Kioshan, Honan via Hankow, China

April 1 b, 1911

Dear friend Mr. Ekle:

Grace and Peace! It is with great joy that I now send you a greeting from China. Thank you for your recent letter. I intended to write earlier but could't remember your address. I am happy that you still hold me in your thoughts. I remember happily the many cozy times I had in your delightful home.

The meaning of "cultural adjustment" becomes real when I think of your home. However I must remember that where I am now there are only Chinese people in China.

It's a long road ahead for me, is it not? However, I realized in my first school year a feeling for mission work and my call to the mission field was not a complete surprise. I had often promised the Lord that I would go wherever he pointed and when this turned out to be China I thank him for this also, I find myself with many concerns for the difficult work that lies ahead but can say with Peter "upon your word, Lord, will I cast out the net".

As you know, there is a rule in the church's Constitution that missionaries have two years to study the language. It is with the language that one must begin in mission work. For the present I am now in Kioshan studying the language.

The Chinese language is unconscionably difficulty. A missionary said once that the devil gave the Chinese this language to frustrate outside ideas from entering China. The language has 40,000 characters. Many of these have gone out of use and many are duplications (two characters for the same word). Characters must be memorized and a native teacher must say them first, _ thereafter the student speaks them. The meaning of each character carries over from historic times. The Chinese teacher has no special training in teaching techniques. Most of them must naturally have his teacup in hand throughout instruction periods. The general impression here is that "you must teach the teacher to teach you".

I have so far learned about 800 characters. With help from a Chinese lexicon I can now read my New Testament reasonably well. I have also made a couple of efforts to give talks but I have no idea if the Chinese understood what I was trying to say.

Overall, I find the language study interesting, actually very interesting. Dr. Behrents thinks so as well.

I find myself feeling pretty much at home in this new situation. For me things are most pleasant here in Kioshan. Our Chinese associates are most friendly. Although there are wide individual differences the overall skin coloring is predominately yellow. However many are in such poor health that one can hardly see a skin color. People for the most part live in small mud houses packed close together. All larger cities are surrounded by a high wall. Towns have usually a pair of temples, one Confucian and one Buddhist. These temples are well attended on Chinese holidays. Dirt covers everything both inside and outside. Many of the temples and the idols are fallen down and that seems of concern to no one.

Peoples' occupation is mostly agricultural labor. And how bountiful their fields are now! The land is almost all flat.

Our location is in a remote and low populated area in the province of Ronan. There are, however, heavy populations round about on all sides of the area. When one goes up a small hill by Kioshan one can see more than 50 country towns. We have, as you know, opened 6 principal mission stations on our assigned mission area but the most until now remain as outstations.

I have been assigned to a new station called Sin-tsae. Sin-tsae has not yet been visited by any of our missionaries. The town is a day's trip further from the railroad than any of our other stations. There are no Christians there as yet. Sin-tsae it seems will be a borderline in the east of our mission field.

I will in no way look back and it is without fear that I look forward. You should come out here, friend Ekle, and help to build a house. To build a house in this place is an incredibly difficult undertaking. It is, however, an easy task to build when one is accessible to the railroad where all things needed can be obtained from Hankow. But it is a different story away from the railroad when one needs things only available from foreign countries. If one locates the item, the price away from the railroad will be double that of supplies near the railroad. Ekeland is planning to build in Chenyang which is a day's trip from here. I visited him two weeks ago and he was terribly tired from the problems involved in building.

I have never seen such poverty as I see here in China. By home standards the majority of Chinese are **NOT**. In the winter cold these miserable people come to our door and many have not had food for several days, and without house or person to help them. It is likely that many of these die. We must become used to seeing human corpses cast in a heap. East of our district there is widespread starvation in the winter. I have it from reliable sources that graves were opened and the dead eaten. In addition there is the pall of soot that prevails in much of China over the winter. God in his mercy has spared our particular area from the most gruesome troubles. Now we read in the newspapers that epidemics are back with us. We pray that God will spare us from the rampant deadly diseases.

You have no doubt heard and read about the joint seminary project that is underway near Hankow. This undertaking is almost fully agreed upon here in China. The seminary project is projected now to begin in 1913. it includes the Norwegian Mission Association (Norway), Hauge Synod and the American Church. The purpose of the seminary is to train qualified Chinese to be ordained pastors among their own people. For us in China this is a serious and important undertaking. If the Chinese people are to be Christian it must be by the efforts of China's own sons and daughters. At the same time, the total of missionary endeavors can only be a drop in the ocean. Each of the participating missionaries now can wait for their Chinese partners' answer. This cause calls for much forbearance and patience. Our school in Sinyang is this year very well attended but, as you know, this school is only preparatory for evangelistic types of work.

Our evangelist training programs are only intended to prepare people for evangelistic assignments. ("Evangelists" in this context are trained Christian lay workers) It is good to hear them talk to their own countrymen. Many offer heartfelt testimony on salvation through Jesus Christ. I often think, if those at home could hear these messages and prayers, both for the churches in America and for the people here, they would rejoice to be together in the Lord's kingdom in the world.

This became a longer letter than I intended! Easter evening has already gone by so I close with brotherly greetings to you and your family.

H. M. Nesse

P.S. Greeting to you from Dr. Behrents (today Sister Kristine is visiting Sinyang).