

3 Ping Tsang Hsiang,
Nanking.

March 18, 1938.

Dear Nina:-

My letters since the 9th of January have covered events fairly completely up to the present. We have passed through certain quite definite phases during the last four months. The Zone was first conceived on November 16th. Then followed three weeks of hurried planning and organization. After this there was another week when the fighting took place, leading to the capture of the city on December 13th. From that time to the end of December might best be described as the Terror. January was marked by the return of the Embassies and a gradual improvement in the situation. Late December and early January was also the period of "registration," a thing which caused much trouble and difficulty then, but which has proved of little significance of late. The first week of February found the Japanese putting pressure on the people to go back to their homes. Fortunately this pressure did not take the form of armed force as we feared it might, partly perhaps because of "pressure" that we ourselves exerted in various ways against any use of force. February did see however the beginning of a "back home" movement which has not yet ended. With this movement we were of course in hearty sympathy, all we objected to was the threatened use of force. As a corollary to the "back home" movement, February also saw the removal of the hundreds of mushroom shops or stalls which had been established on Shanghai and Ning Hai Roads, after the lessening of the Terror, to Mo Tsou Lu and Han Chung Lu outside of the Safety Zone. March has seen an acceleration of the movement of the people back to their homes combined with a general easing of the whole situation.

This whole period has also been a very interesting one to watch in the life of the people. First the stampede. Last August when Claude and I returned from Kuling, I thought this was striking enough. Again in September, after the bad raids of that month, I understand the exodus was renewed. But in the last days of November and early December only those remained who could not get away, or who were determined, for one reason or another, to see it through. Then next came the trek into the Zone. The police, I believe, went around and advised the people who were left to move in. Not all did of course, but the vast majority felt their chances were better inside the Zone than outside, and they came trooping in, especially during the last few days as the Chinese soldiers began to retreat. We urged them to bring in food supplies and bedding, but discouraged for reasons of space their bringing in anything in the way of furniture. But still some people brought their furniture or what they could of the things they were most anxious to save - and thus the City moved into the Zone. Then came the three weeks of the fighting and the worst of the Terror, when the people were all cooped up in the Zone, many of them in the crowded refugee camps, a time when only a very few even dared to go back to their homes for a brief inspection, and none went back to live. In fact this situation continued pretty well all through January, but after the end of the first three weeks of Japanese occupation, when things were somewhat better, then necessity and convenience and the determination of the average Chinese to make a living, given even half a chance, all combined to transform Shanghai and Ninghai Roads into the shopping streets of the Safety Zone. It was hard to get through those streets during "business hours". Of course it was all very "little" business, but each one was determined to sell what he or she

I was then in Kuling.

could to make a little income for the family. In February, when the Japanese through the Self-Government Committee began to put pressure on for the people to go back to their homes, pressure was also put on these small roadside vendors to move too, with the result that Mo Tsou Lu and Han Chung Lu became over night the busy streets of the city. This has continued even up to the present time in spite of the fact that during this month the population has scattered quite generally to various parts of the city.

You may well ask, "What are the people selling?" The answer is, "Everything they can get their hands on." And I mean that literally. Food of course is always in demand, and it has been interesting to watch how little by little supplies of various things that were for a long time absent from the local market began to appear again. For example during the Terror almost nothing could be bought, then gradually a few vegetables became available, then meat, some of it of a very questionable kind, and so on item by item until the market now affords a fair variety. I well remember when the first eggs reappeared. For weeks we had to depend on Ginling's very scanty supply for such as we had and they were few and far between. Even yet we have no fresh fruit unless we buy Japanese apples, which, for all our sympathy with a Japanese boycott, I must confess we do. At present there is no actual shortage of food in the city for those who have the money to buy it. Surplus stocks are low, and the city is more or less living from hand to mouth in the matter of foodstuffs, but there is enough for the moment. Our Relief Committee has managed to keep always a few weeks ahead of the demand for those dependent on us, but we have more than once been worried as to whether or not we could continue to do so. Those who do not have the money to buy rice are at present on free rice, either from us, or the Red Swastika, or the Self-Government Committee. Moreover to the more deserving families, as we have been able to investigate them lately, we have given a certain amount of financial help, \$28, 598 to 7,848 families, or an average of \$3.64 each. This is not much of course to a family, but such as it is, it has been most gratefully received, especially when it has been coupled, as it has often been, with a ticket to the hospital for some sick member of the family, or a piece of bedding, or some beans, or perhaps a ticket for free rice for a certain period. But I am getting away from my subject; I started out in this paragraph to tell you what the "nan min" are now selling. Let's stick to that. They are selling more than food too as you will see below.

Heaven pity the absentee landlord in Nanking at this time, or the house owner who does not have a caretaker on his place! The Japanese first ransacked the town and took what they wanted, and now the "nan min" or the "lao beh sing" are finishing the job. One can hardly blame them, the poor folks have got to live somehow, and the result of it all is that the most surprising variety of stuff is now offered for sale in Nanking's curb markets. It must be like what 1927 was, except that it is now on a larger scale and from Chinese rather than foreign houses. Furniture, clothes, vases, electric fans, books of all sorts, pictures, curios, hardware, a little of almost any thing you could name, and all a grand medley. The sellers are ready to part with the goods for anything that seems a bargain to them, and one could pick up bargains too with a small investment of time and money, but so far I have bought nothing, from lack of time even more than money, which is saying a good deal. Of course this sort of business, if such it can be called, is really non-productive. It is simply a transfer of "movable" property from one person to another, with a little money passing, merely as counters in the game, so to speak. No new wealth is being created. What is here is changing hands and being used up. That is all. Superficially it looks as though business were going on, actually what is taking place is devastation.

With love, *Plumer.*