

McGilvary Theological Seminary
Chiengmai, Thailand
March 10, 1954

Dear friends,

Warmest greetings in Christ from Thailand, the land of promise for 1954. As you receive this letter, in America at least Spring will be bringing its annual renewal of life. This word is sent out from us here, half-way around the world, to assure you that there are signs of "spring" in the Church of Christ in Thailand, too. It is probably well that our first year in Thailand was marked by numerous shadows and somber vistas. We were being acclimated to the host of problems that beset the church today: the shortage of leadership, the lack of adequate training facilities, the absence of a sense of stewardship, the vigor of a Buddhist revival, and the easy-going nature of life in Thailand. There was very little literature available in Thai. There were signs of tension between the Thai and Chinese portions of the Church, a tension heightened by government policy. What leaders we met were overworked. What programs were suggested were limited or eliminated by lack of personnel.

In speaking of "spring" we would not suggest that the above critical problems are all solved and put behind us. Cold days do not stop the instant a crocus appears, and baseball games have been postponed by snow in May. Rather it is that the crocus foretells more glorious things to come. This year, close on the heels of Mr. Grether's return (swelling our seminary faculty to three) the second post-war class graduates from McGilvary. Four graduates may seem like a pitifully harvest to many of you, but to us on the scene each of these lives is a dedicated blessing to a needy church.

Look for a moment at Sawong, for he personally illustrates a host of the difficulties the Gospel faces in Thailand. Of Chinese parentage, but striving to be a good Thai, Sawong speaks Thai, Chinese (Swatow and Mandarin) and English. He was led to the Lord in a way almost beyond my comprehension. After his father died when he was eight (Sawong, that is), he went to look for a home with an uncle to ease the burden on his mother, Sawong being the oldest of four children. One day this illiterate uncle bought some books of a Christian evangelist in the market place in his village. This undoubtedly reflected merely the Chinese reverence for the printed word, for the uncle could not read at all. But sometime after, he asked his nephew, then 13 years old, to read the books to him. We cannot tell you what happened to the uncle as a result of this, but reading God's words to him led Sawong to Christ. He inquired further at the small Thai church in his city in South Thailand and received baptism before his 14th birthday. Now, ten years later, he will be graduated and will return to the South to serve in a fine Chinese Church in his district. Scholarship funds supplied by the mission have enabled him to give up his work as a teacher and still support his two sisters in school while he attended seminary. He is not a brilliant student and he must work hard each step along the way, yet last December he secured the prize in his class for the best examination paper in Thai Bible. He is a devoted, conscientious servant of the Lord.

This past year we have watched the Church give added emphasis to special weeks of evangelism in the institutions of the Church. Eighty student conversions last year have given new impetus to the program this year. McCormick Hospital has just closed such a week of spiritual emphasis with seven souls brought to the Lord among the staff and the student body of the School of Nursing. The Church of Christ in Thailand is making overtures to receive a young missionary couple from the United Church of the Philippines to come to McGilvary Seminary. These people would be the second such couple to come from that neighboring state. One of the 1952 graduates of the seminary is also under consideration for training to join our faculty.

Mission work in Thailand is 125 years old. In its early days it was used as a stepping-stone toward China, THE GREAT mission field to most people. After those early days the work here was left very largely to the Presbyterian Mission alone. One mission can never supply the necessary personnel for a task such as this, however, and Dr. McGilvary regrets the fact in his autobiography that there are no people available to minister to the hill tribes: the Miao, Laos, Yao, Lissu. That was eighty years ago, and at last destiny has opened the way for such a ministry. THE GREAT field is closed and countless mission bodies are relocating people in this needy land. Predominant among them and laboring side-by-side with us here in Chiengmai is the former China Inland Mission (now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship). Their large staff of China workers and hosts of annual recruits have fanned out over Southeast Asia. Already in Thailand they outnumber the Presbyterian staff, and they are bringing the "Good News" to those very hill tribes for whom McGilvary prayed. The American Baptist Mission (Northern) has expanded its Burma work to reach the scores of Karen villages in Thailand. The Southern Baptists, especially among the Chinese, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance groups are increasing their work here too, in the Central and Southeastern portions of the land. As God willed in His own greater Plan that the Church of Christ in China mature under conditions of trial and testing, He has also brought the needed workers into this rich and promising portion of the Vineyard. In peace and security (rare blessings in our modern world) we are able to labor to build the foundations for a strong enduring Church in Thailand to the glory of God the Father.

Since Dick has written of our work here, let me add a bit about our home. John spends his time entertaining everyone with his antics and his smiles. He is not the least interested in anything that looks like a schedule, but since he sleeps from 6 P.M. to 6 A.M. (almost), we don't care much about the other times. He has dark brown eyes and dark curly hair (not kinky but with a soft cewpy curl on top). All four of us think he is wonderful. Kenny and Sharon play a great deal of the time pretending one is a baby and the other Mummy. When I hear someone say, "Now it's your turn to be baby," and crying starts immediately, I have learned not to worry about the sudden cry. They have a lot of fun together and, of course, quarrels.

Sharon is getting to be quite a young lady, but she is still into something all of the time. She is very different from her quiet brother who will sit for hours looking at books. Kenny now "reads" to Sharon. He can read them only because he has had them read to him so much; and woe betide the parent who tries to "shortcut" in reading a story. When he is showing her picture books in these rare times when he can get her to sit down with him, he makes her repeat the names after him. Both of them talk Thai with the servants - much of which we cannot understand since it is local country language. If we ask Kenny what a certain word means, he usually says, "You have to talk Thai to know what that means." This is a real blow to his parents' morale since they are studying three to five hours a day in an attempt to learn Thai.

Kenny's progress in the use of his legs is slow but sure. He still falls frequently but much less so than formerly. When he walks slowly, you can scarcely detect any difficulty in walking, but when he attempts to run (a fast stiff-legged walk) the impairment of muscles is very marked. We are so thankful for so much improvement and continue to pray and hope for even more. We hope, too, that he will be able to go to Thai school this coming May.

Now that we are beginning to speak some Thai our home has been used for the weekly church prayer meeting, having some Thai people in for meals, a Christmas tea for the nurses, another tea for the church leaders, etc. We are so thankful to have a home to share, and hope through the coming year to have more and more opportunities to do so. While you are reading this we will be resting up for the new school year at the Christian Farm in Chiengrai, sharing the Easter season with another section of the Thai Church. On May 3rd the seminary opens its sixth year and another busy season descends upon us. But this year with us who are new to the triumphs and trials of the Thai Church, with the Thai backed by the influx of workers for the Lord, and with all of us everywhere who profess the Name that is above every name, these words seem to ring out with new meaning and power:

THE PEOPLE WHO DWELT IN DARKNESS, ON THEM HATH THE LIGHT SHINED

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you all,

The Bryants

P.S. Several times some of you have asked how you could help our work out here in those "little" ways that frequently make the difference. We have always been reluctant to speak of financial things, but after almost two years here, we have come to see the pressing need for pictures, especially Sundayschool leaflets and large posters. Used ones in nice condition would be deeply appreciated, although new sets are never rejected. Religious calendars, too, would find a ready use. The rather drab and simple Thai home is regularly enlivened by pictures. We would appreciate large picture calendars such as the insurance companies or airlines print, too, for a lovely picture framed is an ideal gift. Here are a number of inexpensive, helpful suggestions.

Those of you who have given to the memorial fund for Adeline in days gone by will be glad to know that the fund is being transferred to provide scholarship support for a student at the seminary instead of its original medical purpose. The principal has reached the respectable sum of \$2400 but needs to be three times that to fully achieve its purpose. Mr. Guy Fox, Box #855, Shawnee, Oklahoma, or the Board offices at "156" will gladly accept future gifts to be applied to the principal.

*Still remembering over the years and dreaming of a
tour of Sweden some furlough soon. Our love and prayers
to you and our other colleagues from Kiaochow - Tsingtao.*

Dick and Evelyn