

m. s. "NEONIA"
Monday Morning
April 26, 1948

Dear Friends:

Although this letter is not addressed to you, yet it will be appreciated if you will kindly consider it as a personal letter. The details of our trip are all the same, so we thought it best to put it out in this form as you are anxiously waiting for some news from us.

As I sit before this typewriter, I wish to jot down some of the thoughts bursting for expression in my head and mostly in my heart. It is impossible to convey to you on a piece of paper the joy that is ours as we journey towards Indo China. It is a joy, not as the world interprets that word, but it is God given with peace and quietness in our souls as we get nearer to Indo China each day. This country is still in the throes of political unrest. They are fighting for complete liberty, to rule their own land. It is unsafe to life in most of the Vietnamese territory. The situation is not a wholesome one, but since the door is open, we are going back. Beloved, we can only go forth on the strength of your prayers, otherwise we would not return. Someone wrote to us in a farewell letter quoting Psalm 33: 18-19: Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." This is a very appropriate and precious promise for us.

There is so much to say in this letter. We left Switzerland on March 19th and today it is April 26th and in two days we are arriving in Okhamandal, India which is 350 miles north of Bombay. A great deal has happened between these two dates, so perhaps it will be best to write in chronological order.

We left the beautiful, peaceful country of Switzerland on Friday morning, March 19th. When we looked from the window to see what kind of weather it was, we noticed it had snowed again during the night. I would like to have some of that snow and cold weather right now as we are sailing through the Arabian Sea. That day of departure seems like a long time ago. The family was at the station to say goodbye to us. This was not easy for them as they all looked so gloomy and no doubt we had that same expression. All of them had been so good to us while we were there. They could not do enough for us and we could fill pages of their goodness toward us.

Our first stop was in Geneva as we had to visit the missionaries studying there and report to the New York Board. There are eleven of them studying French. When they complete their course, they are leaving for French West Africa. It does your heart good to see these new recruits preparing for the service of the Lord. We had several delightful days there, including a large farewell service on Sunday in the Conservatory of Music which was completely filled. The Lord blessed in this meeting and many hearts were touched.

The following morning, a lady came where we were staying as she was under conviction. She had been in the meeting the night before but did not yield to the Lord. That night she did not sleep at all as the Lord was speaking to her heart and she knew it. She was delving into Spiritism, reading a great deal about Theosophy and had all sorts of books on these false cults. Mrs. Van Hine had a long talk with her and then we prayed together. When she left she said it felt that she had lost a great burden and there was real peace in her heart. Two days later before taking the train for Paris, we visited this lady and she gave us all these books which we burned in the Pastor's home. It was a beautiful fire to see these books go up into smoke. Here was a soul, held by the power of these isms, but now made free and happy through the precious blood of our Lord. It was a happy moment to witness this before leaving.

Our next stop was Paris. The Society asked us to visit there, to see if future missionaries could be properly housed, with sufficient food and to learn French. The latter is possible, but the former is a great question. This kept us busy for several days to gather the necessary information. We were honored during our short visit there to be presented to the Under-Secretary of State. This distinguished Frenchman graciously received us in his large spacious office and kept us a half hour, as he did most of the talking. When he escorted us to the corridor, he wished us success in our work, that is personally and for the Society. He also said if we ever needed him in Indo China, to feel free to call on him as he would be glad to help us in any way possible. During our conversation in his office there is one remark among many others that I am sure will interest you. He said that missionary work in Indo China has a wholesome effect upon the people. In other words he recognizes the value of preaching the Gospel there, only he uses his own phraseology.

I was just thinking, maybe all this does not interest you. It might sound like a report instead of a letter. If it does, then write to us in Saigon, telling us what you want. The address is:- Mission Evangelique, 329 rue Frere Louis, Saigon, Cochinchina, French Indo China. If you want our news letter, then write just the same, but give us plenty of news about yourself. Now I will ramble on and roll over these keys.

Where were we? Oh yes, in Paris. We should not forget Paris, neither will we forget. It was the Easter week end. When I arrived, I immediately tried to get railway tickets for our trip to Antwerp. I was informed the train to Antwerp had been sold out two weeks ago. What were we to do? There was nothing to do but pray. Everyday I went back to the station to see if there had been a cancellation, but nothing doing. Finally, the afternoon before I left, the same request was made with the usual answer. Later on the same afternoon, I again went and there were two cancellations that came in while I was there. We were certainly happy to have them and thanked the Lord for it, otherwise we would have missed our freighter in Antwerp.

Upon our arrival in Antwerp, we went directly to the steamer, that was late afternoon on Easter Monday. We finally sailed on Wednesday afternoon. This was ideal as it gave us time to fix up our cabin the way we wanted it on this freighter as it is a long voyage. Our clothing had to be arranged because in Switzerland it was cold, so naturally we had warm clothing. Now we were wearing Spring clothes, that is in Antwerp, and right this very minute we have taken off all we dare to peel off and at the same time to look respectable.

As we were sailing from the port of Antwerp with the Pilot still on board to guide us down the river, a storm signal was received. When we came to the mouth of the river, there were a few ships that had dropped anchor as they preferred not to go out into a stormy sea. Our Captain decided to sail on to Rotterdam with the result that we experienced a very bumpy sea. It felt good to arrive in Holland although the ruins we saw in the city did not make us feel good. We saw several areas of many square blocks of buildings that had been completely destroyed by the Germans in twenty minutes. The Dutch had cleared away the debris and now grass is growing in many of these places. That is the result of war with all the horrors.

The trip through the North Sea, the Channel, and across the Bay of Biscay was nothing of special interest, unless you call my sea sickness an interest. In brief and bluntly speaking, I don't. We were soon out of that storm. It was good to see the coast of Portugal, then Spain, into the Mediterranean Sea, a long good look at Gibraltar and then those snow capped peaks of Sierra Nevada looked beautiful with the afternoon sun shining on them.

We were nearing Genoa, in fact only one day from port when we ran into another bad storm. The waves washed right over the bridge and our cabin is underneath. The two windows were closed so the water could not get in. We do not have port holes in our cabin. Soon the water started to leak through the ceiling. First it was a little drip here and there, then a big drip and a few minutes later it was running in. That put us into action. Nelly had a dose of fever and I was sea sick, so neither of us were well, but we got busy with pails here and there, big bath towels to keep some of the water off our bunks. Then I stood on a chair, swinging back and forth like in a circus act, I held those large bath towels across the ceiling to catch the water which soon was running down my elbows and into one of the pails. It all sounds funny right now as I think these details over, just a few of them, but it was not funny at all. It lasted for two hours. When the waves did not wash that high, we straightened out the cabin, re-made the beds with dry linen and then we hung low until we arrived in Genoa the next day.

It was Saturday, April 10th, when we docked in Genoa, a sea port that I would say, not exactly badly hit by the Allies, but hit bad enough to show the scars of war. We saw houses with no roofs, but people living in them. They were terribly battered, but these poor souls had to sleep somewhere and this was the best they had. Not far away, in fact just where we docked, the Germans had a long range gun on tracks that went into a cave in the hillside of solid rock. When the navy shelled the port, they dropped their salvos right into the mouth of that tunnel. As far as marksmanship, it was perfect and to think the battleships were out of sight, beyond the horizon of the sea.

On Sunday, we were still in port, so right after breakfast we went to look for a protestant church. This we thought would be difficult, but the guard on the ship directed us to one. It had been rebuilt since the war, a lovely marble church with over a hundred people there. The music was good and the delivery of the pastor excellent. Every now and

then, we understood a word, so we got the gist of the sermon. The closing hymn was an old familiar one, "Let the Lower Lights be Burning..." That was meant for us. After the service we spoke to the Pastor, asking him if he could speak English. Since he could speak French we had a delightful conversation. He took us to his home above the church where we took a picture of him on the veranda overlooking the harbor. Just before we left, he said, "your visit is like a ray of bright light to my soul." Well, his shining face, his earnestness, and to see those happy christians was a blessing to us too.

Here is something else that I thought was interesting. On Saturday afternoon while in town, I stopped a well dressed gentleman to ask him to direct me to the Post Office. He in turn asked me what my nationality was. When I said we were Americans from New York he immediately told us to follow him. In front of the Post Office, he said, it was a privilege to be of some service to us. He tipped his hat and politely walked off. He was not a guide or one looking for a tip. We thought that was real courtesy.

Early Sunday evening at seven o'clock, we sailed from the harbor which still has some wreckage sticking above the water. We were soon out in the calm Mediterranean again. The next point of interest was on Tuesday morning, April 13, when we saw the volcano, Stromboli. She was smoking steadily but we were told she is not active, so we did not see any lava. Later in the morning we entered the Messina Straits with Italy on our portside and Sicily on starboard. Then suddenly we saw Mt. Etna which was covered with snow. The next day we saw the Island of Crete. It made us think of Paul and his missionary journeys.

On Thursday morning, April 14th, which was my birthday, I woke up at 1:15 smelling smoke. Imagine me waking up, smelling smoke when I am such a sound sleeper. When I opened the cabin door, it woke up Nelly as smoke pour in. She asked me what was wrong but I banged the door shut and went out to see what was going on as nothing could be heard and no one to be seen. Thick smoke was everywhere and soon I bumped into the second officer who was giving orders on the lower deck. He told me that everything was under control, so I rushed back to our cabin to inform Nelly but I found her as calm as could be near the door by the upper deck. It was strange I was as calm as could be too and did not realize at that moment the danger we were in. Soon other passengers were smoked out of their cabins and it was amusing, watching them running to the deck all excited. We immediately assured them it was all over and under control. A fire broke out in the pantry and we thank the Lord it was found in time with only slight damage. Many of you are praying every day for else and this is an answer to prayer, I mean that there was no disaster which could have easily happened.

Friday the 16th, we landed in Alexandria. There was nothing special there. Everybody looked so poor and the houses around the port were filthy, although further in the city it was clean with a modern hospital and lovely hotels. Since the war this port has not picked up much tourist trade.

Are you still reading or are you getting tired? Perhaps I will cut it short. Saturday we were in Port Said, the entrance to the Suez Canal. We went ashore to do some necessary shopping and then went back to the ship which is like home now. The deck was looking like an oriental bazaar. The merchants were everywhere. A good thing we locked our windows and the door of our cabin or they would be in there too!! The pilot came on board at nine o'clock and we were soon sailing through the canal with a moon almost full. It was beautiful to see the trees along the bank and houses now and then.

The next morning we were still slowly sailing through the canal. I can say we were crossing the desert on board a steamer. That does'nt sound right but it is true just the same. What amazed me on Sunday morning was to see the vegetation growing on one of the canal and a desert on the other. Why the difference? The last time we went through it was all desert. Now they have irrigation canals and in brief they can raise anything. Immediately I thought of that verse, "...the desert shall blossom like a rose..." Let the water of life into any soul and the life of that one like a desert will also change. What a wonderful illustration this way before our eyes.

We were soon out in the Red Sea after unloading cargo at Suez. Then we saw the place where Moses crossed with the children of Israel. Further on, Mt. Sinai could be seen away in the distance. It made us think and meditate on these great Bible events as we sailed through the hot sea.

The next port was Aden where we arrived on Thursday night, April 22nd. We could not go ashore, neither the next day, so we looked the dry, dusty town over from the deck.

We could see camels pulling old wooden carts, old buses filled with Arabs and now an then a British Army patrol car filled with soldiers. This is a fueling center and not much of a port. There is very little rain fall which we could easily tell and vegetation practically null. There were'nt any regrets when we sailed from this port.

When we left port we were informed by the Captain that we were not going to Bombay directly but would first stop at Okhamandal which is 300 miles further north. It is in a northern direction from Bombay but we do not have a north climate. We are anchored off in the harbor right now (Wednesday April 28th) and it is HOT. The perspiration is dripping from my elbows as I type this letter. Perhaps I should bring it to a close which I will do.

We know you are thinking of us and praying for us but don't forget to write to us. The address is:-

Mission Evangelique
329 rue Frere Louis
Saigon, Cochinchina
French Indo China.

With many greetings to all of you, we are

Your representattives for Christ,