

McGilvary Theological Seminary
Chiengmai, Thailand
October 19, 1953

Dear friends,

Our "Christmas" letter of 1952 was delayed in part through the problem of getting adjusted to a new land. For some of you it arrived after Easter. A corrective was planned in terms of sending out a second epistle in June. This is it. We know that all of you are understanding and forgiving of the weaknesses of man and the ever present issue of the unforeseen, so we do not hesitate to send this tardy but warm message of greetings and love. The unforeseen entered in June, catching our little boy Kenny as he was recovering from a twice-broken arm (in April during our vacation, in May in our front yard). It came in the form of Polio, a disease for which we all have more than a healthy respect. This letter is written by two parents thankful beyond measure to God, the Great Physician, for the recovery which their son has been granted. From June 7, when Kenny collapsed amid what appeared to be a slight cold and fever, through two and a half months while he lay helpless with a rigid spine and neck torn by spasms of pain in his legs, to the time when step-by-step he began to lift himself and put into play muscles long idle, we lived in a world of prayer, surrounded by a circle of wonderful friends in the missions here and the local church. Now, four months later, Kenny is in the midst of learning again to walk, standing by holding on to objects nearby, riding his tricycle with joy, but crawling when he plays. What reasons for joy there are in retrospect: that Kenny, although stricken the hardest of all of a number of cases in the Chiengmai foreign community, has no evidence of complete paralysis or loss of function in any limb; that Sharon did not contract the disease at all so far as we know; that through all his suffering he retained the same smiling and cheerful disposition that we have always rejoiced in.

Important to the family as Kenny may be, the life of the Bryants in Thailand has many other aspects. Foremost among them is the seminary, which opened on May 5 with fourteen students. The slight increase in enrollment was a disappointment, admittedly, but the quality of many of the new students has been a source of joy. Dick has little enough to do with them for his Thai is still at the primary level, and his teaching is confined to the four students in the advanced class. The major problem that these students face is financial, even though the total cost of a school year is only about \$250 at McGilvary. To find the delicate balance between offering a free education which would fill the school with unworthy students and demanding too high a tuition is no easy problem. Further, the school has no "name" which would give prestige to its graduates. This fact is not only true in this Buddhist land, but even within the Church of Christ in Thailand itself. Two of the advanced students are the sole support of their families, meaning five people in one case, making it necessary to maintain a student "self-help" program without interfering with their studies. Finally, the Thai Buddhist pattern of earning merit by giving to temples and priests is, strangely enough, a barrier to developing stewardship in the church. There is no merit involved in regular giving to the work of the church. There is no regularity to the giving of the Thai Buddhists, and the priests receive through "begging" daily on the streets. (It is not truly begging for the people are more than anxious to give and line the streets in the early morning to share victuals with the saffron-robed priests.) At the same time the Church here has not yet learned to conceive of the ministry as a full-time work^{er} service. All the people see and think of are the services on Sunday. The mission field is an education in just how much we take for granted as a part of the life of the Church at home.

Two days after the completion of our first year in Thailand - we landed on September 27, 1952 - Dick led Chapel at the seminary in Thai for the first time. This act did not reflect any remarkable progress in the language, but did show how much more readily the phoenetic language of this land could be learned than the Chinese characters with which we struggled for so long. Kenny's sickness was a big setback to Evelyn's study, but even so we are pleased with the way in which we can make ourselves understood within this short period. Fortunately for us, the weather through this first year has been temperate for the most part. True, April was hot and dry and September hot and sticky, but overcast skies and a cool breeze made the weeks in between far from unpleasant. At

the height of the rainy season our sometimes almost dry Ping River flowed over its banks briefly twice, but without the volume and destructiveness that marked its three floods the year before. Orientation to Thailand was enjoyable, not a difficulty.

Perhaps the most rewarding feature of the period of orientation was the experience of getting into the villages and small Christian circles away from this city. This was the big disappointment of the civil-war conditions in China, the countryside was closed. Through the dry and cool season Dick was able to make several trips to church dedications, rice harvest festivals, and simple church worship services, climaxed late in March with a trip by truck over the mountains to Chiengrai and the Christian Farm at our mission center there. One of our students who has a share in the farm cooperative is being supported by the other members of the farm so that upon graduation he can enter into service at their church in the middle of the farm village. Christians from all over North Thailand assembled there for the annual rice festival, an auction of local handiwork with the proceeds going toward the work of the whole community, and ending with the sunrise dedication of the new planting. The Farm is a large Christian cooperative on virgin land outside of Chiengrai. Over forty families have joined to raise rice by modern mechanical means and to bring the witness of a Christian community into the area about the farm. Still in its infancy and with many acres of its land still not cleared and put to cultivation, the Farm promises rich fruits for the Gospel in the years ahead. Riding about this green semi-tropical land, a person is struck with the amount of land still untouched by its prosperous population. It is true that the exploitation of her teak forests has made that wood rare and expensive now. Logs must be hauled from deep in forests of heavy vegetation and poor transportation. True, also, is the tragic fact that the tin industry dropped off sharply with the signing of the truce in Korea. But so long as rice is the staple food of Asia's millions, Thailand will not starve.

A typical day in Bryant household now finds the morning equally divided between classes at the seminary and Thai language study at home for Dick. Evelyn squeezes in her share of the latter around the diminishing, but more vocal, needs of Kenny and Sharon. The early afternoon is the English period; three for Dick at the seminary and two for Evelyn at the School of Nursing of McCormick Hospital. That is, that was the picture until the end of September when Evelyn took time out for more important things. These things include two legs, two arms, two eyes, a nose, a mouth that is usually open and making loud sounds, a collection of dark colored hair and a body that ties them all together under the name of John Robert Bryant. He broke in upon us on October 14th without import duty or purchase taxes. The package weighed 8 lbs. 6 oz. and was delivered direct at McCormick Hospital. Past experience has led us to believe that such packages change the normal routine of a household markedly, and hence a third letter shortly after Christmas will probably be more elucidating on the issue of how we fill the hours of the day.

For the present let it suffice that we find things to do and rejoice in the interest and concern which you folks have faithfully shown in our work. We thank God for the prayers of those of you who have helped to bear us up in Kenny's illness. We thank God for the loving support all of you give to our service here. We thank Him continually for His call to this rewarding and challenging field of usefulness and witness. May He bless and enrich you all as He has so wonderfully done with us.

The Five Bryants:

Evelyn, Dick, Kenny, Sharon, and John