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## 1909-08-07, Letter from Frank Keller to Ralph Smith

Frank A. Keller

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[Written on Bible House of Los Angeles letterhead]  
[Copy]

Changsha, Hunan, China,  
August 7, 1909

Mr. Ralph D. Smith,  
Bible House of L.A.  
524 Lissner Bldg.,  
Los Angeles, Cal., U.S.A.

My dear Ralph:

Last evening I wrote you three sheets, and hope to be able to give the entire afternoon to you to-day, but urgent medical calls have kept me hard at work, and on call taking me across the city and over the river in the intense mid-day heat that nearly undid me. I have not come so near to sunstroke in a long time. First of all, let me thank you for the beautiful copy of "The Patmos Letters", that came to hand this afternoon, in fact was awaiting me on the return from the above mentioned trip. I appreciate the book greatly, and more your loving thoughtfulness in sending it. Do you remember Allen Cameron? He visited Ganking when we were there and we were deeply stirred by his simple earnestness. His is living and working here in Changsha. He is true to the core, loves God with all his heart, and it is a real privilege to pray with him over the things of the Kingdom. He tells me that he hears from you occasionally. By this mail I am sending some samples of his work in the publication line. He has a small press here, and is expecting

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another one soon. His "Broad-cast Tracts", for free distribution only, have been used widely in China. He has itinerated more in Hunan, I think, than any other man now living. Of course, Dorward, who dies some years ago, spent eight years constantly itinerating in Hunan. Recently I learned from him that he had been planning to publish the Gospel by Mark in paragraphs, and with headings, following Rotherham, but he had not thought of "underscoring" or bringing striking passages in red. He enthusiastically approves to that plan. Now with Cameron prayerfully in mind, let us go back a little. I trust last evening's letter will reach you with this. I regret that I did not make two copies as to send one with this letter. It informs you that I will have to return to America probably within the next few months. If the letter should not have reached you yet, please await it for details. When I know that I must go home soon, I went to my knees before God to learn His will regarding your proposals. I knew that my colleague Mr. Veryard was much dissatisfied with working in a city where there are nine evangelical missions besides ourselves, and other non-evangelicals, and that he was longing for itinerating work in new fields. I laid before him the Motor and houseboat and emphasized Gospels plans, and asked him to think and pray over them, and as soon as possible let me know if he felt that God would have him take them up in case we had to leave. I think he stayed up all on night praying about it, and then he came to me and said the plans seemed to him a direct answer to prayers of the past six months for guidance. He said

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that he had already written to Mr. Hampson, our colleague who is on furlough, telling him that on his return he was going to apply to the Mission for transfer to a Province and field not so overcrowded with missionary societies as this local field is. But that in the event of our having a motor boat and house-boat,

and with an opportunity for free and widespread distribution of the Word, he would be perfectly satisfied to remain in this field, and take charge of the boats and the distribution work when we were obliged to leave. There was another factor that seemed a strong evidence of God's will in the matter. One of the young men who recently confessed Christ in baptism, and was admitted into the Church, is a born mechanic, he is a real genius, and best of all an enthusiastic Christian, and a preacher of more than ordinary gift. He seemed, and still seems God's own provision for the engineer of the proposed motor boat. These two facts, together with the fact that Dr. Hume most cordially offered to stay on an extra week at Changsha and take care of my Customs medical work, made me feel, after some days of prayer, that it was best for me to go to Shanghai, first, to lay the matter before Mr. Hoste, and get his consent, second, to personally visit the publishing houses, examine papers, get terms, and look up the many details connected with the publication of the marked Gospels, which could be done much better and more quickly in person than my correspondence, and third, to look up the motorboat matter. Difficulties beset me at every step, but I am very thankful that I went to Shanghai, for I think that almost if not quite a year of delay has been saved by it. Now

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for some of the difficulties. First, after all arrangements had been made with the Presbyterian Mission Press for getting out the first edition quickly, the manager said to me, "Of course, you will get the permission of the Bible Societies first, for we can do nothing without that." So I rushed off to the Agents, full of joy and hope, only to be met by a blank refusal, and an assurance that they would fight the plan to the end. Mr. Hykes, of the America Soc., advised me to send a written request to Agents of the three Societies, which they would send home to the headquarters, but he and Mr. Bonfield of the British and Foreign Soc. both told me that in sending the requests home. They would advise the Societies not to grant it, and Mr. Bonfield urged me not to even make the request, and so put me under the necessity of opposing it. Mr. Archibald, of the Scottish Society, assured me that it would be at least two years before a reply came back, and that then it would be unfavorable. In the meantime, Dr. Hykes, of the American Soc., offered to co-operate, on terms which I gave you in my letter of July 3<sup>rd</sup>. He did not absolutely promise, but said he thought it would be possible. Some of the above is a repetition of part of July 2<sup>nd</sup> letter, but it seems necessary for clearness. Please pardon the repetition. My letter of July 2<sup>nd</sup> stated that the action of the Bible Soc. Agents would cause a delay of three months at least, that was written before I saw the Scottish Soc. Agent, Mr. Archibald, who lives at Hankow, and who gave the much longer time mentioned above.

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The next difficulty was that Mr. Hoste felt he could not consent to Mr. Veryard taking up that line of work. In the first place he does not approve of free distribution, as I think you know already, and in the second place, in view of the way the missionary societies are located in Hunan, any results of the distribution could count for the upbuilding of other churches, and not of the C.I.M., Mr. Hoste felt that Mr. Veryard has ample scope for all his efforts in the local field of the C.I.M., Mr. Hoste felt that Mr. Vinyard had ample scope for all his efforts in the local field of the C.I.M. work, where his time and labor would all count, by the blessing of God, for the growth and strengthening of the church with which he was connected, and for the development of which he had been sent to Changsha. As soon as I can get the promised map to you, you will see at once the reasonableness of Mr. Hoste's position. I am working to the very limit of my strength, almost beyond it, I fear, for I am putting in more than full time, in spite of the heat which compels all the other missionaries to lay off, that is the very few who have remained in the

city, nearly all having gone to the mountains. So please pardon me if I do not succeed in getting maps, reports, copy of Mr. Warren's letter, and other matter to you as promptly as both you and I would like. I preach every morning, except Sunday, when I only preach once in two weeks, and am the only missionary doctor in this great city, with Christians and enquirers of the many missions here coming to me, besides the large Customs and Post Office Staffs. I have not had one evening a month with my wife for the past year and a half, not even Sunday evening which I have to spend in preparation of Monday morning's service at half past eight. So you see the work

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I am putting on the "Underscored Testaments" has to be squeezed into days already very, full. I am glad to do it, more glad that I can tell you, over and over I have praised God for this great joy, and I would not have you misunderstand me. I meant what I wrote on March 30<sup>th</sup>, "I will do all in my power to further it", but of course, I too am a missionary of the C.I.M., and my first duty is to faithfully do the work assigned to me, and then do as much more as I can find time for, taking the time so far as strength will allow, from recreation and sleeping hours. So, as Mr. Veryard could not take up the work, I waited on God for light and the more I prayed, the more my thoughts seem to be directed to Mr. Cameron. He is a missionary not connected with any society, and therefore could go into cities where other missions are working without arousing jealousy or opposition. I have taken pains to see and talk with missionaries from various parts of Hunan, as they were on their way to Kuling, and I fear that for a missionary of one society to attempt work, as I suggested in March 30<sup>th</sup> letter, I bottom of page 5, would be to excite opposition and jealousy. But an independent work could do it very nicely. Mr. Cameron had been praying about the matter, and would be glad to take up the work. As you will see from the printed matter sent under separate cover by this mail, he is partly supported by a church in the states, in Denver, I think. You may know of the church. He would very much like to go home in January, 1910, to lay the work before the people of his church, and elsewhere if opportunity presented, and is waiting on God for funds for this purpose. (By "the work" above, I

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mean his "Broadcast-Tract work). He would be willing to travel steerage if necessary, as he has done before, to get home. In the meantime, his wife would stay here and look after the local work in his absence. If you remember him, and think favorably of him for this work, I should think that it would pay you well to pay his passage to America, that you might get to know him and talk the whole work over with him. He is not a finely educated man, not a man of great culture, but he is a man of God, a man of prayer, and a man of deepest loyalty to the Bible. He is a faithful worker, and one who has endured much hardship for Christ in China. I wish that I felt more certain about his executive ability, but on this point I feel a little hesitation. I hope that you may remember him well enough to be able to pray intelligently about him, and if so led, that you may see him and decide the matter after a personal interview. How I wish that you could come to China this Fall, spend a couple of months with us, or the Winter if possible, visit as many of the Hunan stations as possible and talk with the missionaries, and lay plans for a broad work. You are so much better prepared to deal with the various problems as they arise, and for you to spend even a month here, right in close touch with the whole situation, would, I believe, save months of time, pages of letters, and would put the work on a basis that it deserves to be put on. You doubtless have

thought of it, but I cannot refrain from reminding you that Hunan has a population larger than Spain!! And the Hunanese are the strongest people in every way, in China, and I pray that God may open

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up the way for us to put the Gospel in the hands of all who can read it, and also open the hearts of many of them to receive it. Another plan occurs to me, and by the co-operation with the American Bible Society already decided on, it may prove satisfactory, namely to work through leading missionaries in the various centers in Hunan. This would need first, education, for with three or four exceptions, every missionary with whom I have talked to is opposed to anything like free distribution. But if these missionaries could be visited, for instance by you, and the advantages of the plan laid before them, and then if they could be kept up to the work by frequent letters, there would be accomplished a large and fruitful work. These missionaries could get their supplies direct from the American Bible Soc. in Shanghai, and made reports directly to you, thus doing away with a middle man in China. The map, when ready, will show more clearly the advantages of this plan. I had hoped to write you fully of the motor boat situation and problems connected with it, but I have time for one more page only, and that must be devoted to answering your questions. I must say this, I am pushing investigations, getting prices and descriptions of motors, etc., and have found an earnest Christian builder in Hankow, who has a large ship building plant, and will make us a first class boat at an honest price, if it seems best to build, but I will take no positive steps without first making a full report to you and getting instructions from you. God willing,

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I hope to write about this next week. I cannot this week. I fully approve of your suggestion regarding a brief statement of the plan of salvation at the beginning of the Gospel portions, but the Am. Soc. has very strict rules about binding any other matter in with the Gospels. And we may not be able to accomplish it, if not we must be satisfied with a separate tract, as in the past. The same is true of your proposal regarding a different title for the cover. I consider it a most valuable suggestion, but fear that it cannot be accomplished. These are difficulties connected with co-operating with the Am. Soc. On the other hand, if we do not co-operate, we can do nothing, at least for a long time. So co-operation with all its limitations seems the lesser evil. In your letter of June 8, you ask about sending men to districts that cannot be reached by boat. Please see my letter of March 15 & 30, bottom of page five for full discussion of this problem. It surely is unwise, in the present state of the work in Hunan, unless the men can be accompanied by a missionary, or a thoroughly reliable evangelist like Mr. Yang, of whom there are very few yet in Hunan. It would take pages to discuss this matter satisfactorily. The problems in Hunan, due to the utterly rotten work of one society, make the missionaries of all other societies tremble. The news of the Bible school in Hunan only reached me July 8 on my return from Shanghai. We will pray consistently for it, may God make it a great blessing.

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The news of trouble in Spain seems to show plainly why Mrs. Smith should not have gone with you. How wise He is! How loving not to let us have our own way when it is not for our highest good. How perfect His ways. Dear Ralph, I want to testify, in utter humility, to the joy God has given me through learning a little of the plan of trusting Him instantly. That is a magnificent word in Acts 7:9. "And GOD

was with him.” Oh, that means everything. GOD is with us too, may we not then absolutely commit all or personal arrangements to HIM? It suddenly comes to me that I mentioned this text in letter of Augusts 6. Well. its worth repeating. Now this must go to the post office at once, no time to read it over, so please pardon any “typographical errors”. Heartiest greetings to Mr. Stewart, Mr. Prichard, as well as to Mrs. Smith and yourself. May God have brought you back in safety from Spain, and may He make the next step very clear to you. I hope it may be a step across the Pacific. If you do come, come soon, the sooner the better. In His bonds and service, Affectionately yours,

Frank A. Keller.