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1937-11-30, Letter from Charles Roberts to E.J. Peterson

Charles Roberts

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Hunan Bible Institute
Changsha, Hunan, China

Nov. 30 1937

Dear Mr. Peterson:

Thank you very much for your letter dated November 2 which came to hand while I was in Hongkong. I was away for nearly two weeks. The time seemed opportune to go and arrange for my family to come to Changsha. Perhaps due to the Brussels Conference there was no bombing in South China and the railways were free. We have been back just ten days, and now the railways have all been bombed again and are broken in several places. Furthermore yesterday over the radio we were surprised, and yet half expected, to hear that Hongkong was preparing for emergencies by given the local people practice in listening to warning sirens from gun boats in the harbour! Will Japan spring a surprise attack on Hongkong is now the question? We are glad the family is back and that whatever happens we are together. Our lives are in His hand. Last Wednesday Changsha received a surprise visit from the Japanese planes. This is the first time that the planes actually came to Changsha, altho [*sic*] we have had warnings. AND THIS TIME NO WARNING! There are various and sundry explanations of this state of affairs and a few arrests. Three planes hove into sight, and my little boy and I were watching them overhead as they reconnoitered the city. We, as others, supposed they were Chinese planes altho [*sic*] they were flying very high. One plane circled our compound twice, and I feel confident that it must have seen the huge U.S. flag painted on the roof our auditorium building. This plane flew much lower than the others. After watching a few minutes the children went on with their play, and I to my office to check some accounts. And then—Thud, crack—and our windows rattled as tho [*sic*] someone had slammed a large door, and then thud crack again and then once more. The scramble in this building for the basement and dugouts was wild. Our children flew like the wind to our dugout and by the time I reached there Mrs. Roberts, Kellers and our Chinese were well buried in mother earth! Fortunately our compound was missed by about one third of a mile. This apparent aim was the railway station which is so close to us. One bomb hit within a few feet on the platform of the station another a little further away and a third some distance away demolishing a Chinese hotel and other houses. It is difficult to discover the actual number of casualties, but up to last night killed and those who have since died of wounds seem to be well over 200. And all these civilians going about their ordinary affairs! Our buildings suffered no damage tho a few pieces of glass fell out of the windows, pieces that were loose. I was one of the first to reach the places bombed and some of the mangled bodies were so gruesome for details to be written. Death and sorrow all so unexpected. Such is the unregenerate heart in its madness for conquest, an educated country without Christ can do such things! Six hours before the bombing I cabled you of our safe arrival asking that you kindly pass the word on to relatives, and then later that same evening I again cabled you that we have been BOMBED SAFE as per our arranged code. I trust you received the word promptly as we hear already that they news reached the home papers. Thank you for this co-operation which greatly helps in these times. We have had several warnings since last wednesday put no planes have put in appearance. And a new Governor has been appointed who is strong on defense. And so this morning I am informed we now have 22 pursuit planes here and several anti- aircraft guns. This will at least give us time to think!

Regarding the sale of our Nanyoh property to the Peking National University the Ministry of Education has decided to 'Suspend' their decision to purchase at this time. Already two other Universities have located in Hunan and with the withdrawal of the Government from Nanking to Chungking and the possible advance of the Japanese on Hankow after taking Nanking it may possibly be that we in this province shall come over the present wave of invasion. So there will be no immediate prospect of making any deal with the National University.

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With regard to your reference concerning a budget for the months of September to December I am surprised that you do not seem to remember having seen it. I beg to state that on July 13, 1937 I mailed to your office under registered cover three copies of a tentative budget for the above months. Later when I had completed the rental of the buildings for one year, I mailed to you a letter from Hongkong informing you that I thought [*sic*] that if you forwarded missionaries allowances and Biola Band account the rest would take care of itself from this end. Also I suggested that Dr. Keller be allowed to continue with \$75 a month the ½ allowance which he has been taking for the past few years and that we be given the privilege [*sic*] of taking children allowances as granted by the C. & M. A. for the present and until the complete adjustment is made at the home end for this work. Apparently my letters have been mislaid. However I shall be glad to rewrite for the coming year. I will forward you a new budget in a few days. Regarding surplus income at this end I have already written you and Mr. Bown as explained in my balance to you dated November 5, which balance sheet covers the months of July, August & September of this year. And also I wrote a letter to Mr. Brown dated August 7, 1937 and mailed to your offices the cash receipts & disbursements for the months of September 1936 to June 1937, this period I was on furlough in America. I have received no acknowledgement of this correspondence, all mailed under registered cover. When you receive this letter you should have all of our accounts and balance sheets up to September 30, 1937, except for an analysis of the Accounts receivable which has been somewhat mixed during my absence, but on which I am working and hope to send to you by the first of the year together with accounts up to December 31, 1937. May I suggest that for convenience sake and in view of the fact that we are 10,000 miles apart that a prompt brief acknowledgement be given when such correspondence comes in. During the past years we had so much misunderstanding along this line. We are glad to receive the brief word concerning Mr. Graham being engaged by The Independent Board of Foreign Missions and that the Board of the Institute is negotiating toward an agreement with them for funds etc. The China Fundamentalist has published a picture of Dr. & Mrs. Keller as retiring & Mr. Graham as the new appointee. Please share this letter with Dr. Rood, and with our united Christian love to you both and to the staff and students, Ever truly yours in Christ,

Charles A. Roberts