

From Our Readers

Contributor: Mary Harbage

Constructive efforts to improve human relations on an international level are reflected in this letter from Korea. Mary Harbage is director of a six-member team of educators now working in Korea under sponsorship of the Unitarian Service Committee, Inc., 9 Park Street, Boston 8, Massachusetts.

Mission to Korea

October 19, 1952

DEAR EDITOR: The six members of our educational team are the following: Jay E. Daily, librarian, who has been in Korea before and has taught English here; James M. Dysart, of the Newark (N. J.) State Teachers College; Vester M. Mulholland, professor of education, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Virginia; Mrs. Elisabeth H. Warner, lecturer in education, Brooklyn College; and Gile J. Warren, head, Social Studies Department, Westwood (N. J.) High School.

Our offices are two large rooms in a barracks-sort-of-building and most important, they are on the sunny side and warm up beautifully throughout the day. It looked like home when we got up a wall hanging, put out our newspapers on a table and found a plant. What with desks and chairs for each of us, a phone and six thermos bottles so that we can serve coffee to all visitors, we are comfortably situated.

The natural setting here is beautiful. We look out over the bay and are almost surrounded by mountains. The pleasantest of all our meetings so far was held down on the shore. The weather has been wonderfully sunny and bright—but mighty chilly at night. We already sleep under five layers of blankets. I hate to think what winter will be like for people without five blankets.

The first few days went so swiftly that they just escaped being a blur of names and faces. Our first meetings were with the UNCAK people here in the compound. Mr. McManus, Chief of Civil Information and Education, took us from one spot to another. Our time with the representatives from the Embassy included a wonderful luncheon in a home in the midst of all the official calls. It was good to take off your shoes (literally) for a time and relax. The meeting with the UNESCO group who are here making a survey and helping plan a five-year educational program was exciting. It gave one a real feeling of satisfaction to hear educators from the Philippines, France, Mexico, England, and Dean Cottrell from Ohio State evidence their allegiance to the same basic philosophy and same values. The same feelings came as we talked with the UNCURK. The members of this group were from Australia, Thailand, the Philippines and the Netherlands and their interest in our project was so genuine that we felt they would be following our work all year.

Our interpreters are very special. When they first came, the conversation was most stilted but Betty slipped out and brought back coffee for all of us and the ice was broken. My interpreter is Seong Noe Un and he is extremely careful to explain to me when he is



COURTESY, USIS KOREA

MEMBERS of the team are welcomed to Korea by Dr. George L. Paik, Minister of Education. Left to right are: Gile J. Warren, Vester M. Mulholland, Elisabeth H. Warner, James M. Dysart, Dr. Paik, Jay E. Daily and Mary Harbage.

telling me what another person is saying and when he is giving me his own opinion! Jay trained four of them (including Seong) when he taught English here before.

Trip Into Pusan

My first trip into Pusan will always be like a horrible picture unfolding before me. The population is now about 2,000,000 and normally it is about 200,000. The refugees make up the difference and they are willing to live in the midst of human misery to be south of the 38th parallel. I'll never become hardened to the little children—dirty, clothed in rags if anything, spindly legs, distended stomachs and listless hands held out almost hopelessly. I told the fellows just to talk about something and look out the car window while I cried. The only comfort is that we are here to work and to help.

Getting from one place to another is no easy task. The roads are in very

bad shape and you ride in either a sea of mud or a thick cloud (literal translation please) of dust. The drivers are Korean and communication other than the words "PX," "Embassy," "UNKRA," etc., is at a standstill. Driving and getting someplace seem to be a combination of imagination, luck and near misses in that the attitude of everyone is to get somewhere as soon as you can even though the speed limit is about 35 miles an hour. One of the saving features of a ride is that you get your full amount of exercise just from bouncing up and down. The other is the beauty of most of the countryside through which we go. It is lovely—though too many of the trees have been cut down for firewood. Right now, I'm writing up among the pine trees on a mountain side looking across the bay. It is our very first part of a day off.

We have now spent two days in schools—both in the city and in the country. How can I describe them? One school was built of orange crates

and cardboard boxes. The seats were so close to the teacher that he could not walk at all. The children were on benches with nothing to write on but their laps (and no paper anyway) and there were a hundred boys in that one room. Each classroom is separate and the most of them have canvas roofs. There isn't a sign of glass in the windows. The floors are wellpacked earth. One school was in an old street car with the blackboards put where one usually reads the ads.

I heard a three-part chorus sing beautifully in such a room and listened to Chopin, as interpreted by a teen-age girl, played on a piano set up on rocks in the dirt. I watched truly exciting art work done in such a class. Each Middle school seems to be made up of two-fifths heart and three-fifths spirit. The girls were working on the construction of a new barracks-like building. English is a part of the curriculum in almost every school and we try so hard to understand them. In our high school we were able to converse with a degree of ease once the boys recovered from their shyness.

Dr. George L. Paik, the Minister of Education, is a very fine man. We were impressed at once with his sincerity and his ability. It is well that he is such a hard-working man for there is so much to do and all to be done against terrific odds. Yesterday at a reception he held for us, he asked me what I thought after the days I had spent in the schools. I could only say that they showed great courage, real determination and had a magnificent opportunity. These people are eager to learn and are willing to put up with any conditions so that school may go on.

November 16, 1952

We began working with ministry

officials, our senior counterparts, our assistants (those whom we at first called our interpreters but that word just didn't tell enough so we changed it) and with groups of principals, vice-principals and teachers to plan our first six weeks seminar. The participants in this workshop are from all of the provinces.

In a planning session there were representatives from each study class: Curriculum (Gile), Teaching and Learning (Betty), Administration (Mully), Mental Hygiene and Child Development (Jim) and my own group working in Philosophy. Again David and I had little to do other than quickly line up six days divided into appropriate sections on the black board and to remind the group now and then that the realities of time would permit only so much within one week. We finally had to put on the edge of the board all of the numerous fine suggestions for the future.

The workshop has been made up of many activities—panels, talks, symposiums and the small group work. Committees are functioning "in high." As has been possible, the staff meetings at which major workshop plans were set up have been open ones—with the full one hundred and eighty looking over our shoulders as we tabulated results of questionnaires, set up the small groups, etc.

All the daytime hours are now spent at the Yang San Primary School on Yon Do. There we use the auditorium (about as sizable as a good acre roofed over), five classrooms, a room in which our translators work and a library. At first the library boasted nothing but a sign on the door—but now we have books (not enough), benches (ditto), tables (also) and hope to have shelves. The rooms are, of course, unheated but

so far we have been able to get out into the sunshine to warm up. A blouse, three sweaters and my suede jacket plus wool anklets have been sufficient so far to keep me cozy. (Plus, I hasten to add, the regular other clothes.) We eat at the R.T.O. mess at noon and you should see us peel—for the combination of a heated room and hot food removes all sweaters in a hurry.

I am a complete source of wonder to the children. After hearing one phrase repeated again and again—in tones of utter awe I finally asked someone to translate for me. They were repeating the words, "Too tall, too tall." The boys show much greater security than the girls both in planned and chance situations. This is easily understood when you remember that the boys have been considered the most important part of the family for a good four thousand years. When children see you coming down the hall they stop and bow—a stiff sudden little bob enlivened by a twinkly smile. Even in the midst of wrestling they take time for this greeting and as soon as we have passed they (of course) resume the wrestling.

Classroom situations are dreadful. Often there are just benches, once in awhile rough tables. If there are no benches the children simply sit on the floor or on smooth rocks. There are very few books, very little paper and only a few pencils. But the important thing is that every child who possibly can is going to school.

In one of the girls high schools there are the usual rough board classrooms with canvas roofs all grouped around an open court. That one space is the "multipurpose" room. There on the day Betty and I visited, well-trained choral groups sang to us in Italian, German, English and Korean.

Sense of Urgency

The grounds and buildings of Ewah Women's University have often been described to me as being the loveliest in Seoul, and quite like those of Vassar. Now Ewah is housed in a series of near shacks perched on the side of a mountain. I saw it all, from the Kindergarten almost at the top of the mountain to the mimeograph room—a dark little corner at the front of it. Music, art, science, home economics, commercial subjects, literature, teacher training, languages, history, medical training . . . a full university program is being carried on under great difficulty. I spoke to the girls in their assembly period (or rather to only a part of them for the one large room will house only a part of the student body). I spoke in English and there was no doubt that they understood, for they laughed in the right places! I could only commend them on the fact that they felt an education so important that they could have the courage to go on to school.

There is a great sense of urgency about this matter of being educated. It is easily understood when you realize that for about forty years their schools were completely dominated by the Japanese and that during that time few Koreans held any administrative positions and that children were allowed to neither speak nor read the Korean language. Then add to this the facts of war—and you wonder that they managed at all.

We had only two pre-set ideas as we started our work. One was to stay together as a team and the other to adapt and adjust to the needs of the situation as the way opened up so that we could do everything possible to help in educational reconstruction. I can honestly say that the team has accomplished

more in one month than I had hoped we might have done in six. We deal in realities and the practical far more than we were expected to—but within that area we can really help. They are eager for the ways and thinking of a democracy though at first they were a little doubtful about our procedures. (We didn't stand up and lecture!) In some places we feel that natural resources, native abilities and personnel are not being wisely or adequately used. In some instances there is a lack of awareness of the possibilities for improving a situation. There needs to be much emphasis on the fact that the educated person acts on thinking. There is great need for technical and vocational training. After all it was not only in the schools that the Japanese held the key positions for all those years.

Used clothing may be sent to Korea through American Relief for Korea (ARK) with addresses at 133 East 39th Street, New York 6, New York and 10901 Russett Street, Oakland, California.

There are many other ways in which you can help. If you send \$2.00 to Rev. Richard Gray, Treasurer, Director of Religious Activities, O.W.U., Delaware, Ohio, you will provide milk for thirty days for one hungry child. Or \$2.00 sent to George T. Blydenburg, M.D., Student Health Service, Delaware, Ohio, will buy multivitamins to supplement the diet shortage of a Korean child for 60 days. Or write to the Cooperative Recreation Service, Delaware, Ohio, for their booklet "Good News From Korea." CARE has excellent packages for Korea—both ones made up of food and others of clothing and sewing materials.

—Mary Harbage, UNCACK, 820 1st A.U., A.P.O. 59, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

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