Mt. Silinda Institute
Southern Rhodesia, Africa
March 11, 1949

LETTER FROM DR. REULING - #6 *

Dear Friends:

Travel in Africa is generally by the usual conveyances, car, plane, or train, but has interesting features of its own thrown in. For instance, our journey eastward from the middle of Angola to Elizabethville in the Congo was spiced by the enormous quantities of powder-fine dust sucked up by the train as it passed over the plains, and this was mixed with fine ash from the wood-burning engines. I may have been dirtier at some time in my life, but I can't remember when. Actually the train was quite comfortable, considering conditions. It traveled very slowly and made long and frequent stops so that during the night we managed to really sleep. The cars are surprisingly cool. Of course they are made of wood, but are evidently very strong for all that, and much more comfortable than steel ones in the tropical sun.

On entering the Congo we had to scramble around and raise some Belgian money that we hadn't counted on, as the Belgians demanded that we pay a deposit on some of our apparatus. They wouldn't cash traveler's checks, but fortunately we had enough American currency which some one was willing to change for us. I got it back on leaving at Sakania on the other border, and now have nearly a hundred dollars in Belgian Congo money that I don't need particularly, and that is going to be hard to change back to anything usable.

On the southward journey we were fortunate in being able to spend two days at the Falls Hotel, at Victoria Falls, which I had never seen. The Falls have to be seen to be believed. A mile and a quarter long at the top, the water drops around 350 feet with a tremendous roar, and throws up spray that we saw ten miles away from the train. One morning we took a three-hour launch trip up the Zambezi, and had tea on a little island where we amused ourselves by watching the hippos in the river and the monkeys that came right up onto the tea table and snatched food. Several small crocodiles were visible in the reeds from the launch. A few days before an eleven-year-old boy had been killed by an elephant near the hotel. He was with his parents who, in spite of all warnings to the contrary, allowed him to get out of the car to try to photograph a cow and calf. He wanted some motion and threw a stone at the cow, who trumpeted. He then threw a stone at the calf, and the cow picked him up and dashed him against a tree. The game guards had to go out and shoot six elephants after that, evidently not wanting to have any about who knew what it was to kill a person.

At Livingstone we drove through a small game reserve, and were annoyed by a large zebra who put his front feet on the running board, rattled his teeth against the glass, and tried to bite the window posts. The driver couldn't move off, the animal was so close, and threatening to kick every time we gave any signs of leaving. An emormous giraffe blocked the road, and the car had to pull out into the bush to get around.

Our trip to Mt. Silinda was via Bulawayo and Fort Victoria, where Frank Meacham met us. It is about 170 miles from Silinda. We spent a few hours at Zimbabwe ruins, which have been the cause of much acrimonious archaeological controversy for many years. Some say that they were built by the Phoenicians, others that King Solomon's gold miners built them, and others that they are of more recent origin. Whatever they are, they are most interesting, fortification, temple and dwellings, remarkably well built. Small objects, such as gold beads,

* Letter No. 5 not yet received.

are being found all the time. The African people who were around when the white men came knew nothing about them.

We slept that night at Birchenough Bridge over the Sabi, one of the most beautiful high silver spans that I have ever seen anywhere. It was built by the same firm that built the Sydney Bridge and is the same pattern. Mr. Stock, at whose little hotel we stayed, is a hunter of note, and the rooms were lined with rows of lion skulls and game heads.

It is very interesting to note that although we have come into Southern Rhodesia which is much further advanced and ever so much more settled than Angola, we have got much closer to lions and elephants. Lions have been on the station recently, and farmers around have lost a lot of cattle. Our missionary doctor, Dr. Masters, and a local man shot one just near here just the week before we came. The reason that these animals are around is, of course, because this place is between the very deep, broad Sabi Valley which is full of game, and through which several herds of elephants are usually roaming, and the very wild, rough country of Portuguese East Africa on the other side. Mt. Silinda is just on the edge of the escarpment, and three or four miles away the land drops off at a tremendous rate, down to the coastal plain. As it is heavily wooded, it forms ideal country for wild animals.

Tsetse fly is a great problem here, and the Southern Rhodesian Government has fly men on duty all the time. They cut a strip of timber along the border, and keep hunters busy all the time shooting out the game in this strip, as the fly is carried by buck. Fortunately the fly south of the Zambezi is not infected with human sleeping sickness, but it carries Nagana, a disease which causes several different kinds of livestock to die a slow, lingering death. We drove down forty miles into Portuguese East, through the jungle, day before yesterday, and several flies, which are fierce biters, came into the car.

The country all around here is beautiful. This is just the end of the rainy season, and there has been enough rain to make everything green. However, appearances are deceptive, and there is no strength in the grass. Rainfall is far below normal, one of our dug wells which has never been known to fail having dropped from 24 feet of water to seven feet, and still going down. Crops are burning up, and already, over in Portuguese East Africa, corn is $10 a two-hundred-pound bag instead of the four or five that it should be. There is hunger already in many parts, and if rains don't come within the next couple of weeks there will be a great deal of starvation. Our hospital here already has a number of cases of starvation that have been carried in from a distance. It is most serious because this drought is general, covering a great many countries in Southern Africa.

It was very good to get back here and meet old friends, both missionary and African, and to renew acquaintance with some of the settlers whom I had met before. I'll write about our work here next time.

Best wishes to all,

John A. Reuling

Distributed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Massachusetts

Mt. Silinda
Southern Rhodesia, Africa
March 14, 1949

LETTER FROM DR. REULING - #7

Dear Friends:

Our stay in Southern Rhodesia is practically over and we are about to leave for the Union, via Salisbury, the capital, where we are to have a conference with some of the officials of the education department.

In many ways Southern Rhodesia is more fortunate than most African countries. The Government has taken early steps to prevent some of the abuses and disasters that have occurred elsewhere. This is particularly true as regards conservation of soil, timber and water resources. Whites and Africans alike are required to farm in such ways as to save the soil and keep the streams from drying up. Lands which have been badly eroded in former years are being rehabilitated, and new areas being opened up are placed under proper safeguards.

The Government is also more sympathetic to the African people than in many countries. This shows itself in the substantial grants made to mission schools in all grades, in the well built and well staffed African schools which the Government is putting up in the large cities, and in the concern that there is for housing, public health, and social welfare. It was interesting to visit a young man, son of our senior pastor, who is employed by one of the large municipalities as Welfare Officer for the large African community. He is a graduate of the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work, founded by Ray Phillips, in Johannesburg.

Economically, too, the Africans of Southern Rhodesia are better off than in most. There are still many hardships and difficulties, but these are not as great as elsewhere. African artisans are finding general employment opportunities and wages are gradually getting better. An interesting thing to watch is the proposed political union of three countries, Northern Rhodesia, Nyassaland, and Southern Rhodesia, into one country, on the federal pattern. Northern Rhodesia and Nyassaland safeguard the political and other rights of Africans more than Southern Rhodesia (in these countries Africans, elected by Africans, sit in Parliament). One of the burning questions with regard to the proposed union is, of course, whether it will advance or retard the progress of the Africans. Responsible European leaders of Southern Rhodesia have stated publicly that they now regard the African as having a definite place in the country, and that they regard his advancement of paramount importance. They have further stated that if the Union is brought about it must be on the basis of greater rights and opportunities for Africans. This is particularly significant in view of the present retrogressive and oppressive policies in the Union of South Africa directly to the South. It is indeed a fine thing to see that Southern Rhodesia, whose Native policy has not always been as liberal as one would like, is drawing closer to those countries which, comparatively speaking, offer more freedom and opportunity to the Native peoples than does the reactionary Union.

In spite of all the hopeful signs, the Africans still suffer from many disabilities. They lack proper political representation. Much that is done for them is done because it will bring economic benefit, direct or indirect, to the European section of the community rather than because of any general acceptance of the rights of the Africans themselves.

The clamor for education is universal. Schools are full to overflowing and there is a demand for more. Generally speaking the present level of education

is not really adequate preparation for the problems of today, and higher schools are a most pressing need. In our own area, for instance, the three great educational needs are: for a two-year post 8th grade agricultural course to train demonstrators and to train some of the many whose lives will be spent on their own small plots of land; for the raising of our present top standard of academic education from 8th grade to junior high (senior high should follow within a few years); and for the training of teachers after they have finished junior high, and later after senior high, instead of giving them a two-year course after 8th grade as at present.

I have been very proud to note the part that the American Board and its workers have played in improving conditions for Africans throughout the whole country. A senior officer of the Government education department has publicly credited us with having done more for the development of the Africans than any other single agency. A great many teachers and artisans have been trained, and are to be found in all corners of the country, often far from our own area. Even more important is the fact that many of the government officials who have to deal with Africans have been influenced over the years by the Mission and its work, and in their own dealings with the people frequently display a fine Christian attitude.

However, the present situation is exceedingly difficult. Our schools and our mission in general are seriously understaffed and the work is slipping in several directions. Christian forces still have a tremendous responsibility in a country like Southern Rhodesia, and if they do not prove adequate to the task of training leadership and of demonstrating in a positive way that we really believe in the application of Christianity the African people cannot be blamed if they turn away to one or other of the false "gospels" now being placed before them in such attractive form. They desperately want to develop in the Christian way and are making many sacrifices to that end. The Government that rules them is rapidly getting a greater sense of responsibility for the people, but neither of these is as yet sufficient to carry the task alone. The modest contributions of personnel and funds from the stronger American churches are still needed to provide the leadership without which the people will continue to be helpless.

I have been most gratified with a development that was started when I was here in 1946. Formerly the American missionaries formed the body that decided matters of policy and that communicated with the Board. Now a Mission Council has been formed, which includes the missionaries, the four African ordained pastors, and representatives, both men and women, of the church. I attended a session of this new joint body which now handles most problems formerly handled by the Mission alone, and was much impressed with its working.

Many of you know one or the other of our East Africa group personally. The Meachams are at Chikore, doing a tremendous job, Mrs. Meacham as Mission Treasurer, and Frank in general station work, which includes the school and agricultural extension work among the Africans who live on the 23,000-acre Chikore farm. The Orners, also at Chikore, are stalwarts, Mrs. Orner devoting her time to the language study of the new missionaries, and Mr. Orner handling a large circuit of Day Schools.

At Silinda Mr. and Mrs. Bill Webb, Miss Torrence, Miss Craig, and Mrs. Hack are kept busy with the work of Mt. Silinda Institute. They have, of course, a number of African and Colonial associates. Teddy Buck has just returned to the hospital as a nurse after an absence of about five years, and you can be sure is very welcome indeed. Pat Williams is just starting her work as domestic science teacher in the Institute after a period of language study. The Mission has been without an American Board doctor since the Lawrences left, and has had a series of local medical people who have come for short periods. We now rejoice

in the fact that we have Dr. and Mrs. Masters, who have also just finished their language study. The Masters are English people, who have, however, been appointed as full life missionaries by the Board. They are already making a splendid contribution and we expect much from all of them.

The Mission is also eagerly awaiting the arrival of Marie Bushong, now completing a special nursing course at our Hospital down in Durban, and Bill Barker, who is to take charge of the industrial work. Bill and Marie are to be married shortly after Bill, who is now on the water, lands next month, so the Mission will have a new family.

It has been very pleasant to hear from many of you, and these letters circulated from my office are very poor compensation for the trouble that you have taken to write. However, I do appreciate it.

This particular Africa trip is beginning to run out, with only one more country to visit. To be sure, I shall return via Angola, spending a second very brief period there. On the trip down it was impossible, because of distances and the season of the year, for our missionaries to assemble, so I am planning on getting back there for the last few days of their annual Mission Meeting.

With best wishes to all, I am,

Sincerely yours,

John A. Reuling

Distributed by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Massachusetts

Johannesburg
South Africa
March 25, 1949

LETTER FROM DR. REULING - #8

Dear Friends:

Here I am back in the city of gold where everything is rush and bustle. This time I entered by train from the North, coming down from Rhodesia. You can be sure it was thrilling to see the enormous mine dumps looming up on the horizon as we approached the city.

As the train neared the city we could see literally thousands of new houses, all for Europeans, under construction. However, all of this new construction has made very little impression and it is as difficult to find a place to live in Johannesburg as it is in any city in America. The situation for the Native Africans is much worse. There has been little or no building for them during the past few years, and those who have come into the city to meet its demands for labor have had to shift for themselves. In one place that we went through, Moroka Township, over 40 thousand Africans are living close together in little shacks that they have constructed themselves. This township grew up just over night. At first the people had nothing but a few sticks covered with burlap or wrapping paper, but most have spent every spare minute on their houses, and by using bits of scrap tin, old cans, tar paper, etc. and by plastering with mud they have actually created some reasonably weathertight homes, although conditions are still bad.

There is a big argument going on now as to whether the Government should take direct responsibility for housing, or whether employers of labor should be made to pay a housing levy. Far too few seem to think of a more obvious solution, i.e. paying Africans a living wage so that they can provide their own houses. That they will do this if they can is amply demonstrated by the nice neat, well-constructed homes that one sees in every slum area. These places, a pitifully small minority, belong to those few Africans who have a little better income. It is noteworthy that whenever they do manage to get ahead Africans usually improve their homes.

One pleasant evening was the opening of the new International Club in Johannesburg, a place where people of all races can gather freely. Mr. Alan Paton, who wrote Cry, the Beloved Country, gave the main address, which was fully up to the standard of his book. Incidentally, the conditions as described in his book are not at all overdrawn -- in many instances they have deteriorated since it came off the press.

It was a pleasure to see our folk, Dr. and Mrs. Ray Phillips and Rev. and Mrs. Lee Bergsman, at work. The contribution that the Phillips have made to the life of African people in all of South Africa cannot be calculated. Their work in founding and carrying on the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work is, of course, very valuable, but of even more worh is the lesson that they have taught municipalities, the Government, and great companies about the need for trained social workers and the practicability of training Africans themselves to do this work for their own people. We visited a number of areas where graduates of the school are doing a very creditable job under difficult conditions, and other areas where students are working with children or with adult groups as part of their training.

In contrast to the long experience of the Phillips, the Bergsmans have just recently arrived in Johannesburg, after a period spent in studying Zulu in Natal, but they are already making a name for themselves as they undertake the difficult task of succeeding Dr. and Mrs. J. D. Taylor. Mr. Bergsman works with

the pastors and evangelists in our numerous churches in the mine compounds, city locations and country areas of the Transvaal, and travels great distances in the old Mission car that has done almost one hundred and five thousand miles over roads that are sometimes good, but more often bad. He is displaying a judgment which, when coupled with his youth and enthusiasm, promises great things for the near future, and Mrs. Bergsman in her contacts with girls and women and in the Johannesburg Native Schools is doing an equally important work in her own way.

We were fortunate in arriving in Johannesburg just before the start of the annual pastors' conference. Some 35 pastors from our Transvaal and Natal churches were gathered together for four or five days of deliberation and work. I was very glad to renew acquaintance with a number of my own former students in the group.

The first session that we attended was an evening program and reception. In addition to the pastors, a large crowd of local people was present to welcome them and to hear the Mayor of Germiston (large mining and industrial city near Johannesburg where the conference was actually held) who welcomed the group. It was somewhat unusual for a South African white mayor to go, with his wife, way out into the center of a "Native Location " on a dark night to welcome a group of visiting black ministers to his city, but it was even more unusual for him to stay not only for his own short talk near the beginning of the program, but right through a lengthy list of speeches and songs, followed by fruit, cake and cold drinks. He spoke very well and the people appreciated his staying. Dr. McKeith and I both had a chance to speak briefly at this reception, as well as at the regular session on the following day, and Dr. McKeith was presented with a large frosted fruit cake with his name on it -- a pleasing modern adaptation of an old African custom of giving food to important visitors. A group of nicely dressed waitresses came in at the back of the building and, still in accordance with tradition, sang and danced as they bore the cake down the aisle between the crowds of people.

The African people have been going through a time of great trial lately. The Government has set up a commission to investigate education, but the terms of reference seem to indicate that the commission is supposed to "prove" that they should have a different and an inferior education to the rest of the population. Their "Native Representative Council " which was established by General Smuts' Government as a body to be consulted on legislation affecting Natives has been called together and told that legislation to abolish it is to be introduced. The present Government is seeking ways and means to abolish the few seats held by whites, to which Africans on a communal voter's roll can elect members of Parliament. All of the suspicion and fear which these and many other repressive measures have engendered found some expression in the African-Indian riots in Durban. However, it is to the credit of the bulk of the people, and particularly to the credit of the leaders of the Africans, that in spite of tensions they have for the most part kept their heads. Everywhere we have gone we have been received just as cordially as ever by African leaders, who have been perfectly frank in talking to us about their problems. There is remarkably little bitterness, but leaders are worried about the possibility of more violent outbreaks. All stress the value of the work done by missionary bodies in training a growing number of leaders who can counsel their people wisely, and in their present helpless state appeal for increased support, both moral and material.

We leave shortly for Natal where I will be quite at home. I have already met a considerable number of former students and colleagues in and around Johannesburg, and am naturally quite excited at the prospect of getting back to the place that was actually home for fourteen years, and that in many ways still seems like home, although I happen to be living elsewhere.

Best regards to all.

John A. Reuling

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14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Massachusetts