

CHAPTER LII
TEACHING IN CHINA

By Miriam

Charles and Miriam had just become engaged when Miriam got a letter asking her if she would go to China and teach chemistry for a year. She decided to go and sailed all alone from Vancouver on the Empress of Canada on August 23rd, 1923. Her birthday was lost somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, for when she went to bed one night it was Tuesday, August 28th and when she woke up it was Thursday, August 30th! That was the first unusual thing which happened to her after she left America. It was a very happy trip. She met some old friends on board and soon got acquainted with many new friends, some of whom were going to Peking where she was going to be. She says: "Sunday morning, September 2nd, we came down to breakfast expecting to make our first stop that day at Yokohama and found this notice on our bulletin board:

"Wireless advises this morning that Yokohama was destroyed at noon Saturday by earthquake and fire. There is no accommodation for passengers ashore and place is cut off from all contact with the outside world. The ship will call there only for the purpose of embarking passengers and loading mail.

"We are unable to get any further details as the shore stations will not allow us to work and the above message was one that was permitted from our Emp. of Australia at present alongside the wharf at Yokohama. From the like cause we are unable to get messages through. Any further information received will be posted in due course."

A further notice appeared later:

"September 2nd, 11 a.m.

"It is reported that at first shock of the earthquake buildings collapsed and fires broke out in various places. Fukugawa and Seu-jn totally destroyed and deaths mountainous. Flames originated in Mitsukoshi (department store) and spread to the Metropolitan police board, Imperial Theater, etc. which were burnt to the ground. The city is still in flames spreading from Seu-jn to Shinagawa, the conflagration being visible from seven miles distance. Railway bridges are destroyed in many places, the traffic being totally suspended."

(Note - Fukugawa and Seu-jn are parts of Tokio, fifteen miles apart.)

That gave us all a very queer feeling and all of us were very much frightened, although we did not let on to each other. Charles at home was very much worried because the newspapers said that the Empress of Canada had been wrecked and all aboard lost, but after a while he found out that wasn't true. Our captain ran our boat very slowly all day long because he was afraid of a tidal wave or some other danger from the earthquake. The stewards set up cots in all the public rooms and on deck for the refugees they expected to take on board.

Monday morning about four, we began to sight land. We could see the smoke in the sky above Yokohama and flames in the city. Slowly we moved along the coast, into the harbor, and pulled up alongside the Empress of Australia, which had been on the point of sailing when the earthquake occurred, and which had done a great deal of the emergency relief work. As soon as we dropped anchor, our launches began to take off the refugees from the Australia. All day long one boat load after another came over with wounded people - some on stretchers - and we had to turn in to help care

for them. Miriam hopes she will not have to see such a sight again. We looked like a hospital ship with all the cots full of sick people wherever you went. About 10 o'clock at night the last boat full was brought over - about 1,400 altogether. Tuesday morning we left the city still burning and went on to Kobe, where a good many of our refugees were taken off, but some stayed on all the way to Shanghai.

In Peking Miriam spent a year that was like a fairy tale. She taught Chemistry at Yenching University. We lived in an ancient ducal palace called the Tung fu. On the ends of the curved tiled roofs were several queer carved animals instead of just two or three, which meant a royal family lived there. Instead of one big palace there were many smaller houses surrounding courtyards and one courtyard leading into another by a beautiful moon gate. Her chemistry laboratory used to be the gambling den. The dining room was the family temple, with its scarlet and gold leaves. Another building was for the concubines and our chapel once the audience chamber of an old emperor.

Stepping over the threshold (every door has a board across it so you have to step high) of the entrance, she faced a big dragon screen which was put there to keep the evil spirits out. They were supposed to fly straight and could not turn corners, so they would bump into this dragon screen if they tried to come in.

Miriam had a house for herself on one of the courtyards, but it had only one small room. Her windows were made of thin paper. There were no tile bathrooms at the Tung fu. The tub was dark red stone, no running water, and in one corner of the room was a huge earthenware crock filled with water and a dipper hanging beside it. On a cold winter day it felt very cold running across the court to such an icy bath in a kimono. The

servants had to be sent out to have a bath whenever they needed one. Once they sent a new servant out to get a bath and it cost him 8 coppers - 1/10 cent - for a plain bath.

Miriam says they had many servants. The cook was a man, and a man waited on the table. They were smiling, likeable people. There was an amah (woman servant) who made our beds every day and a man who cleaned our rooms and brought us a pitcher of hot water every morning. The man who served the table and the one who cleaned did our washing and ironing. The cook got only \$4.50 a month. We used to hire a sewing woman (amah) to mend our clothes because you could get one for so little money. Miriam's amah made many things for her trousseau - a Chinese can copy anything you give them. Miriam gave a dress to a Chinese tailor to copy and he even put the patch in the new dress!

There was a very funny old fellow who was our gatekeeper whose name was Koo Ta (pronounced gow-da). He lived in a little one-room house just inside the gate. He wore a long pigtail because his mother wouldn't give him permission to cut it off even though he was old enough to be a grandfather. Koo Ta was nearly blind. He had a dinner gong which he rang walking through the courts for classes and meals. He also announced the arrival of visitors to your court by a forced cough and led the procession to your door.

Miriam liked the Chinese food so well that for many of her meals she went over to the Chinese girls' dining room instead of eating with the teachers. She soon learned to eat with chopsticks and to make a noise eating. The girls made fun of her for holding her chopsticks so far from the end because they said it meant that she wouldn't get married for a long time.

The girls paid only 3.50 mex (about \$1.75) a month for their food. They always ate three bowls of rice a meal. Miriam wanted to learn how to cook some Chinese food, so when she came back she could give some to Charles. She went to Mrs. Kao's house about once a week with a friend who could talk Chinese and Mrs. Kao showed her what to do. Mrs. Kao was very much interested that Miriam had a mother-in-law at home. That is the way they say being engaged, and she wanted Miriam to promise to send her a picture of her first-born child. So, Charlie, she sent your picture to Mrs. Kao and some time she will cook you a Chinese dinner just as Mrs. Kao showed her.

Whenever we went very far we rode in a rickshaw. Outside our gate there were always several boys waiting to pull us. The same ones came every day and usually the same boy wanted to pull the same person. Miriam's boy was the only one with a pigtail. He was a very fast runner and when we were out on the road, he wanted to be first. In winter it was very cold riding, so we had a goat skin rug to put over us. Miriam has her goat skin rug lying in front of the fireplace in the library. Her boy got so he knew when her classes came down at the men's college, which was separated from the woman's college by about a mile, and he would always be waiting to take her.

While she was in Peking, she bought a little Mongolian pony and used it to go riding in the country. Not very far away from us was one of the five main gates to the city and we used to go out this gate and ride across the fields. A servant called Ma Fu kept her pony for her and brought it to her whenever she wanted it.

Now you may wonder how she could teach Chinese boys and girls when she could not talk Chinese. All of them whom she taught could speak English. But she wanted to learn some Chinese so her students could not talk about her when she was around. There was an old Chinese man and scholar who

taught some of her friends, so she engaged him to come and teach her some Chinese. Now although she did not learn very much, it was lots of fun, for her teacher was a great character. He wore a long coat which buttoned from a high collar across under his arm and down to his ankles just like any other dignified Chinese gentleman. Sometimes it was black and sometimes blue or pink or white or gray. He wore cloth shoes and his ankles were bound round and round with a long strip of cloth. He wore a little black skull cap of black satin with a red knot on the very top. He kept his finger nails long to indicate he was a scholar and did not have to work with his hands. He would come to Miriam's room and knock and when she opened the door would put his hands together in front of him and bow a very deep bow and ask her if she had eaten rice, which is Chinese for saying good-morning.

At first it was very embarrassing, for she could not talk Chinese and he could not talk English. You may be interested in her first lesson. He pointed to himself and said the word for I and made her repeat it. Then he pointed to her and said the word for you and made her repeat it. He showed her a pencil, book, his watch in turn and told her the Chinese name for each and made her repeat after him. Then he rose, made a deep bow and went away. The next time she was able to say these words and learn a few more.

The first thing she learned to say in the shops was "how much" and "that is too expensive", for in China you have to bargain with the store-keeper as there is no fixed price. Next she learned how to say "stop" to her rickshaw boy and then "turn North or South" to him, but she learned she must never say "turn right or left", for they do not say that. Of course she could count in Chinese. Soon she could say quite a few things and it was lots of fun to try to talk.

For a long time Miriam wanted to come home across Siberia and Russia and Europe instead of going home across the Pacific Ocean. But it took her a long time to get permission from the Russian Government. Finally she did, and on the 7th of July she started for Mongolia, Siberia, Russia and home.

That was a grand trip. It took us ten days to go from Peking to Moscow. Seven of those days we were on the same train. You see it was not so very long after the Russian Revolution and not very many English people were allowed into the country. Miriam was one of the first few American women to cross. There were five other people beside herself who could speak English. There was only one car on our whole train that had sleeping berths. These were called "softs" and distinguished from the other cars that were called "hards" because they had no cushions to the seats.

We took with us a wicker basket, quite large, with sugar, tea, coffee, cheese, crackers, jam, etcetera, because there was no dining car on the train. Our train stopped twice a day long enough for us to get out and buy food from the Russian peasants. There were Russian braziers at the stations with chickens and fish cooking on them - eggs for sale - berries of all kinds - and at each station a big tank of boiling water with which to make tea and coffee.

Our engine was a little old-fashioned engine that burned wood. We had a beautiful trip through forests, past lakes, over mountains. We saw Moscow but did not stay very long because we were not very welcome and Miriam was getting very anxious to see Charles again. And on August 12th, one year and a day from the time she had left him - the S. S. Majestic brought her back to him.

Note by Editor:

Miriam graduated from Wellesley College in 1921, majoring in Chemistry. She did two years of graduate work in University of Pennsylvania, the first year studying higher mathematics as an adjunct to knowledge of Chemistry and the second year in the Chemical Laboratory of the Medical School.

She taught as supply professor in Chemistry in Yenching College, Peking, China, for one year - the school year 1923-1924 - and was married October 11th, 1924 - the Fall after her return from China.

She resumed study of Chemistry in Columbia in 1925, taking part time work in 1925 and 1926.

She and Charles took an active part in Sunday School work wherever they lived. When they were first married, Charles' income from the law was not large and they lived in a third floor apartment in Brooklyn where both helped in the neighboring Methodist Sunday School. When Charles' income justified, they moved to a better apartment in Englewood and later bought their present home in Tenafly.

Shortly after moving to Englewood, Charles became superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School and Miriam took charge of the Primary Department. To perfect herself for this work, Miriam took courses in the School of Religious Education, Columbia University, in 1931 and 1932.