LETTER OF THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

By Mrs. Paul E. King

Monette closed the door, its squeaking hinges making its ordinary and routine sound, then she sat down on the edge of the single bed in her small jungle cabin and sighed with relief. What a busy day. Yes, what a busy, busy day! Not that all of her days weren't busy; they were. But today had gone beyond anything she'd faced since coming to the mission station. So much work to do . . . and to be done . . . and so few to do the work. Often she wept,
and wished she had at least a dozen pairs of hands and feet so she could help more of "her people," as she considered the natives and addressed them when writing home.

A brief glance at the watch on her wrist told her that the hour was late. Her body ached with fatigue and near exhaustion. She longed to be able to pillow her head and get one good night of sleep and rest; one full night of uninterrupted, life strengthening sleep.

She sat for a moment, listening to the night "breathing" around her small home, her body relaxing as the familiar sounds of the jungle village crept in through each crack and crevice of the little building . . . dogs barking, crickets chirping, night birds calling. It was all so familiar, so much a part of her life. She loved it all.

From a nearby hut a baby cried and Monette's body grew tense with fear. She had heard the cry all too often. So much sickness! she thought. So many needs and needy souls!

Hurried footsteps along the path stopped at her door. "I'll be right over," she called into the dense darkness outside as she grabbed the small medicine satchel and disappeared into the night, her footsteps matching those of the boy who came to get her.

They walked in silence down the path, she, thankful that she could help and he, grateful for her immediate response and willingness to help.

The hut reeked of stale wood smoke as Monette, stooping and following the boy, entered the low-cut narrow doorway. She needed no light to guide her around tables or chairs; no cautious word to watch for overhead cupboards or cabinets; the place was bare. Save for the filthy mats on the floor in a far corner of the hut and a black kettle-pot for preparing food, the hut was bare. But then, it was a typical hut; they were all just alike. Only the village chief had anything better, if indeed his small three-legged stool, his rickety table and better-than-average bed-mats could be considered better.

Monette walked straight to the corner where the baby, coughing and crying and fighting for breath, lay in his mother's arms, pulled close to her breast in a noble gesture to ward off the cold of the darkness. But the night had no favorites; its bitter chill stole into the villagers' huts as well as into the
missionary's humble cabin. Her home, however, was a palace in comparison to the miserably-cold, dark, foul-smelling huts of "her people". At least she had a floor to ward off cold and protect her from the extreme dampness of the jungle floor.

Pulling a flashlight from her pocket, she looked at the baby. Then, expertly and quickly, she administered medication from her satchel, ending with a small dose of penicillin given by injection.

She held the child, pulling his cold little body close to her own and wrapping an old worn towel around the shivering, thin frame. In a soft person-to-person tone of voice she began talking to her Heavenly Father, asking Him to comfort, strengthen and bless the worried little mother and to totally heal the infant in her arms.

She felt it when God's peace came noiselessly but wondrously into the hut: The mother's tears suddenly dried; the boy-messenger fell asleep sitting by her side; the infant's body relaxed and soon he, too, was asleep.

With parting words of comfort, Monette handed the now-sleeping baby back to his mother and slipped out into the inky-black darkness down the path to home, amazed how quiet the village dogs were. But then, they were accustomed to her. She was as much a part of this land as they were. She belonged, just as the dogs and the villagers belonged.

Tired but happy over work well done, Monette let herself into her humble abode. Lighting a new candle, she set it on the makeshift table beside the nearly burned-away one. Then, with pen in hand, she began the letter, long overdue because of the pressing needs of "her people".

"My Dearest Father and Mother," it began.

"Would you believe that it's well past three a.m. and that, while I'm weary physically, I feel refreshed in my inner being! I just came from one of the 'homes' -- a miserable, crowded, ill-furnished hut, (how dare I use the word 'furnished' when there is virtually nothing inside?) where I was able, through God's power and the medium of medication, to help a helpless infant and ease his suffering and pain. My cup is full! He is just one among hundreds.
"I took a quick glance at the calendar on my wall yesterday and realized that this is the Thanksgiving season in America. Day after tomorrow you will be celebrating Thanksgiving Day in the traditional American way . . . turkey, stuffing, candied yams, mashed potatoes, gravy and vegetables galore; not to mention a multiplicity of fresh and congealed salads plus the usual mincemeat and pumpkin pies. I will be there; in my thoughts, my love and many prayers, I will be there. But my heart is right here with "my people" and I am completely happy.

"I just wanted you to know how very much I love you both. And, too, I wanted to share a 'bunch' (or should I say a 'bouquet') of 'thankfulnesses' with you. You have meant so much to me!

"First I want you to know that uppermost in my 'bouquet-bunch' is my deep gratitude and thanksgiving to God for giving me the finest parents in the world! You, it was, who taught me from infancy the value and the pure delight and joy of utter and total surrender to God and His will, keeping all of self and selfish desires nailed in death to His cross. Oh pure delight! Pure glory! What bliss! I realize how blest I have been in having been born into your family.

"Next, I want you to know how thankful I am to be laboring here in God's vineyard. This is the land of my calling. I wouldn't trade places with the President of the United States of America. True, there won't be any deliciously-brown, juicy-tender turkey on my table. But little matter. Like Jesus, who said, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work,' thus I feel. Then too, I am really very fond of the myriad tropical fruits that grow here; these I have in abundance. One thing is certain: if I die of high cholesterol it will not be from an over-abundance of fats; I haven't had red meat in months. But I don't miss it; the cans of tuna which you have sent are simply delicious, and you know how well I have always loved tuna! Thanks, dear Mother and Father!

"Tonight, I am most thankful for the house in which I live. Love built this place! Love, hard work, sweat and sacrifice. I feel so humbled and most unworthy of God's goodness to me. I have candles to light at night and chase the darkness out of the corners (and the rats too). My people here have no lights, nothing besides the dying embers of their cooking fires in the center of their huts.
"My cabin-home looks like a mansion compared to theirs! Oh, how I long to be able to provide them with just a few of the simpler furnishings . . . decent beds, a table and chairs, to name but a few of the basic things which we Americans take for granted and forget to thank God for. I am thankful for my table and one chair, crude though each one is. This is home to me and, like I stated earlier, I love it here. But then, one is always content and happy when in the center of God's will.

"You, no doubt, are having beautiful snow. (Remember how well I always loved snow?) Well, there is no snow here . . . nor any sign of snow! ! But you should see the tropical flowers and bushes! Beautiful. Beautiful! Like the many colorful birds native to this area, the flowers too are a kaleidoscope of color. In fact, I have some in a glass of water here on the table . . . one of the little girls brought them to me. Talk about love! I could feel it in each of the flowers and see it in her shining dark eyes and on her face. She just recently got saved. What a gem! I am thankful for Keela.

"Another area for proclaiming my heartfelt gratitude and thankfulness is that which pertains to the village chief. Only yesterday, he told me he was convinced and persuaded that my God was the Great God. Hallelujah! He said he 'gave himself up' to Him. He wants me to have a public service so he can burn all his charms and evil things in front of his people! I say 'Praise the Lord!' This is an answer to much praying, many tears and frequent fastings. Thank you, for praying for this man. God has heard and He has answered. Can you wonder why I am so happy and thankful! I stand in awe and amazement at the mighty movings of God. Just think of it, a heathen one minute, a saint the next! How great is our God!

"When I reflect mentally on my first year here, recalling the probing, silent stares and hostile looks, it seems like a modern day miracle that today the village is almost entirely Christian. What hath God wrought! Nor are these precious villagers Christian in name only; Oh, no! No! They are Christ-like in their daily walk; in their every-day activity, having severed completely from their former ways and mode of living. Today, these who have found Christ in saving grace and sanctifying power, wear shining faces! Do you wonder that I say I am happy and thankful!

"Thank you, Father and Mother . . . again . . . for your many earnest prayers and for your careful and wise counsel when I thought I was so-in-love with you-know-who. With each passing day, I see how very 'unfitted' we were
for each other. I am fully convinced now that, had I ever married him, I would never have seen the land of my calling. I tremble when I think of this. Oh, the heathen blood I would have had on my hands! Thanks . . . much . . . for all those tears and prayers; they 'paid off': I am here, and God is giving souls!

"This being the Thanksgiving season back there, I just felt I must write you and give you a thanksgiving bouquet. My people here know nothing about a Thanksgiving Day, as such. Now that they are turning to Christ from heathenism, I think I'll suggest that we have one such special day here; only, instead of a well-stuffed turkey and a much-overstuffed stomach, I shall propose that we gather together in my front yard grounds and spend the day in praising, singing and thanking God for His mighty deliverance from sin in their hearts and lives. (They love to sing).

"I will have to get a bit of sleep and rest now, so I'll say, 'God bless you, and may you always be assured of my deep, undying love and devotion.'"

Your loving, thankful daughter,
Monette