

A valuable letter of reply

A letter of reply is sometimes a most treasured thing. Here is a story that tells about this common and natural human sentiment¹⁾.

The busiest woman in Labrador during one bitter cold Christmas not very long ago, was an Australian nurse by the name of Kate Austen. But Nurse Austen was not too busy to acknowledge with a long, friendly letter every gift of food or clothing received for distribution²⁾ to the natives in that bleak and barren outpost of the north. Among the gifts was a box of knittings³⁾ for children, knitted and sent by a woman in Toronto.

Nurse Austen, was busy, harassed⁴⁾ and not feeling too well that winter. She could have written just ordinary routine notes of acknowledgement. But that was not her way. She sat down and wrote the woman in Toronto a real letter telling all about the village, and the names of the children who were wearing the knitted gloves and caps, and what they said when they got them, and how they looked when they wore them. She wanted the woman who had knitted and sent all those lovely knittings "to see how much happiness and warmth she had created." Not long after, she received the following answer from Canada.

Dear Miss Austen,

Your letter made me happy. I did not expect such a full return. I am eighty years old, and I am blind. There is little I can do except knit, and that is why I knit so many caps and sweaters and scarves. Of course I cannot write this, so my daughter—in-law is doing it for me. She also sewed the seams and made the buttonholes for the knitted things.

I know something of the work you are doing. At the age of nineteen I married a man who was going to China to be a missionary⁵⁾. For forty years, with an occasional year at home in America, we worked in China, and during that time our two sons and a daughter were born to us, of whom only one son survives. After forty years, my husband's health began to fail. We returned to the States where he took charge of a settlement house in Brooklyn, New York. A surprising number of the problems we faced there were similar to problems we had met in China. When my husband died, I came to Toronto to live with my son and daughter—in-law. They are very good to me, and I pride myself that I am little trouble to them, though it is hard for a blind old lady to be sure of anything.

What I most wanted to say, my dear, is this. For sixty years I have been making up missionary packages of such clothing or food or medicine or books as I could collect. In various parts of the world and to various parts of the world I have sent them. Sometimes I have received a printed slip of acknowledgement from the headquarters depot⁶⁾ or mission board, sometimes nothing. Occasionally I have been informed that my contribution was destined for⁷⁾ Syria or Armenia or the upper Yangtze. But never before in all that time have I had a personal letter picturing the village and telling me who is wearing the clothing and what they said. I did not suppose that ever in my lifetime I should receive a letter like that. May God bless you.

Sincerely yours,
Laura N. Russell

珍贵的回信

回信有时是很珍贵的。这里有一个故事讲述了人类的这种普遍自然的感情。

不久以前一个寒冷的圣诞节，在澳大利亚拉布拉多，有一位最忙碌的女人，她就是护士凯特·奥斯汀。可是，她再忙也要写一封封长长的、亲切的信，感谢为这个地处北澳大利亚边区荒凉、贫困的村落寄来食品和衣服的每一位捐助者。在这些寄来的东西中，有一箱毛线编织品，是多伦多的一位妇女亲手给孩子们织的。

这个冬天奥斯汀护士很忙，心情和身体都不太好，她本来可以随便写一封公文格式的感谢信，但她没有这样做。她坐下来好好地写了一封信，告诉加拿大的那位妇女村里的情况，哪些孩子戴上了寄来的毛线手套和帽子，以及他们戴上新手套和新帽子时说的高兴话和那种快活的样子。奥斯汀要让那位亲手编织了这些可爱的毛线织物并把它们寄来的妇女“知道她创造了多少幸福和温暖”。不久，她收到了这封来自加拿大的回信。

亲爱的奥斯汀小姐：

你的来信使我很高兴，也非常出乎意料。我已经80岁了，而且双目失明。我现在除了织些毛线物外，已做不了什么事情，所以我就织了许多帽子、外套和围巾。当然，我也写不了信，所以我请我的儿媳代笔，她还给我的织物缝接口和开纽扣。对你的工作，我有一些了解。我19岁那年，嫁给了一名去中国的传教士。整整40年中，除了偶尔回美国一年半载外，我们一直在中国工作。在那期间，我们生了两个儿子和一个女儿，但只活下来一个儿子。40年过去了，我丈夫的身体逐渐不行了。我们回到美国，我丈夫在纽约布鲁克林负责一个居民区的事务。在那里我们碰到的一大堆问题和我们在中国碰到的情况是何等相似。我丈夫去世以后，我移居多伦多，和我的儿子、儿媳生活在一起。他们待我很好，我为我自己没有给他们带来太多麻烦而自豪。当然，对于一个上了年纪的盲人来讲，做什么事都不太容易了。亲爱的，我特别想告诉你，60年来我一直在为教会收集捐助的衣服、食物、药品或书籍。我在世界各地将这些东西寄往世界各地，有时收到过有关组织总部或教会负责机构寄来的打印的短信，表示感谢，有时什么也没有。偶尔也来信告知，我寄去的东西已分发到叙利亚，或亚美尼亚，或长江上游地区。可是从来没有人给我写过一封亲笔信，给我描述一些村里的事，告诉我谁穿上了寄去的衣服，以及他们说了些什么。我万万没有想到，在我的一生中竟会收到一封如此珍贵的回信。愿上帝保佑你。

你诚挚的
劳拉·N·拉塞尔

NOTE 注释：

1. sentiment ['sentimənt] n. 情操，情感，情绪
2. distribution [ˌdɪstrɪ'bjuːʃən] n. 分配，捐赠物，捐赠
3. knitting ['nɪtɪŋ] n. 编织品，针织
4. harassed [ˈhærəst, hə'ræst] adj. 疲倦的
5. missionary ['mɪʃənəri] n. 传教士
6. depot ['depəu; 'di:-] n. 库房，仓库

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

7. be destined for 预定，指定