

THE EXODUS FROM HONAN.

By Percy C. Leslie, M.D.

In common with other missions in China, our Canadian Presbyterian mission in Honan has been called upon to pass through a crisis that is unprecedented in missionary work in the Celestial Empire.

To go back to the beginning of this widespread anti-foreign uprising would be a very difficult matter. The seeds of discontent have, apparently, been sowing for years back, and the soil very carefully prepared for the present upheaval of China's millions.

On the 4th day of June last, Drs. McClure and Menzies, with their families, and Dr. Margaret Wallace left Honan by house-boat for a well-earned summer vacation to the coast. At that time everything in Honan was quiet, and our minds free from anxiety, although we did feel that the prolonged drought would cause the people to be uneasy, and the foreigners might be blamed for the lack of rain and consequent suffering.

They had only been gone a few days when active operations began in the North, and Tientsin, Pekin, and all that district was soon in a state of anarchy, the Boxers having centred all their operations in that locality.

On June 13th, while we were quietly seated in our weekly prayer meeting, a letter was thrust into my hands by our officious little gate-keeper, at Chu Wang, which I calmly placed in my pocket, but during the remainder of that meeting I was thinking more about that yellow envelope than what our leader was talking to us about. It turned out to be a special communication from the American Board missionaries at Lin Ching, informing us of the trouble around Tientsin, and the orders which the Consuls had issued to their subjects to leave the country as quickly as possible, or at least to reach a place of safety and neutrality on the coast of China.

We had a brief consultation as to our attitude towards this message and unanimously decided that there was no call for us to leave; that our duty was to stay where we were until more urgent developments took place, and that possibly the whole matter might pass over in a local disturbance.

The next morning we sent special messengers to communicate the news we had received, to our missionaries at the two other stations, Chang-te-fu and Ssin-Chen. Their replies came three days later, and were all a confirmation of our own decision.

By the time we had received their answers, however, the local disturbance became more evident in our town of Chu-Wang, for in the afternoon of June 14th a mob of one thousand or more assembled at our front gate with accusations against us, that we were the cause of the long-continued

drought, and that the new house we had recently erected was keeping away the rain.

Conciliatory measures, however, seemed to quiet the people, and we secured eight soldiers, who remained for some days, to act as a guard on our mission premises. While no security in themselves, they at least demonstrated to the people that we were on friendly terms with the local officials, and the issuing of special proclamations by these same officials also served to quiet the people.

During the next two weeks, however, we were kept in a continual state of anxiety and uncertainty, for alarming rumors were in constant circulation, and we were informed almost daily of some new plot to kill us and to make away with our property.

Three successive special couriers from Lin Ching did not tend to quiet our minds. From these we learned that our friends who left us on June 4th had, on the advice of the American Board missionaries, disembarked and were making their way overland to the capital of Shan Tung province, from whence they would pursue their way to Chefoo. These messengers also brought us the news that matters were constantly growing worse around Tientsin and Pekin; that the Imperial soldiers had probably united their forces to those of the Boxers; that the forts at Taku had been taken by foreigners, and that war was either in progress or imminent.

A telegram from Dr. McClure put our minds beyond all doubt, for when he said: "Come immediately," we knew that there was no question as to what our action should be, and as British subjects in the interior of China, we asked the officials for a safe conduct to a place of safety and neutrality, and made active preparations for leaving Honan at once.

The night before we left Chu Wang we were in doubt as to whether we would live through till the next day, as a violent mob again gathered at our gates, and our Chinese friends and Christians were excited beyond measure, and informed us that it was now a question of life or death. At ten o'clock robbers broke into our yard on the east side of the road, and the soldiers on guard made no attempt to defend us. However, we got another detachment of soldiers, who put the robbers to flight, and patrolled our premises through the remainder of the night.

Sleep was not to be thought of, and our ladies, on the invitation of a Chinese neighbor, took refuge in a little mud hut during these dark and restless hours; fortunately, however, no further disturbance occurred during the night.

As we could obtain no Chinese carter to convey us to Chi-nan Fu, where we had hoped to join Dr. McClure, with his party, we were forced to change our plans and to travel in a southerly direction, with a view