

THE JUBILEE FAMINE IN INDIA.

To the Bloor Street Baptist Church :

MY DEAR FELLOW WORKERS, There was a beautiful feature common to most of the Jubilee celebrations throughout India that was eminently fitting and practical, the feeding and clothing of the poor. In Madras city, out of a population of 400,000, over 40,000, or one-tenth, were fed and clothed in honor of the day. Here in Cocanada, out of a population of about 50,000, some 5,000 were fed in the streets. The sight of 5,000 poor people being fed in long lines on the open roadway, by busy waiters rushing here and there with pots full of boiled rice, from which they dip ample ladlefuls on to the outspread leaves of the emaciated, expectant, and for the time contented participants, is memorable indeed. Men, women and children, what a medley! what a noise! what a smell! That evening, as we were following the elephant with the Queen's portrait fastened to the front of the gaudy howdah, and a Union Jack floating over all, in a torchlight procession of 10,000 loyal subjects, I asked a leading lawyer of the town, who was walking at my side, if many who were not really deserving had not probably come in for a feed. "O, sir!" he answered, "what man who is not in great need would sit in the dust of the roadway and eat like a common beggar!" That is the test. There is nothing surer than that all who are in famine soup-kitchens are in dire distress, or they would not be there.

During the past ten days, an alarming break has occurred in the regular course of the monsoon rains, interspersed with a succession of fiercely hot days, in which the thermometer stood up to 105° in the shade. We have had no such heat during this hot season. The effect upon the people has been direful. The rice market has been very panicky. In many of the smaller villages, where the supply of rice is limited, the merchants have closed their shops till they see whether the rains will continue or not. The poor, who have been coming from the drier districts in the north end of the Presidency, in larger or smaller numbers ever since the famine set in, are now pouring into town in straggling, hopeless, help-less crowds. They lie under the trees by the roadside, and waylay the passer by with piteous cries for help, emphasizing their words with loud blows from the open hand on their aching stomachs.

Dr. Smith writes as follows: "Things are very black indeed at present. Yellamanchili and Narsapatnam have been declared real famine districts. The Collector, or Governor as he may well be called, states that the next three months will be the worst we have had yet, even if we get our long-expected rains. If the rains fail, the officials look for a worse calamity than that of 1877. People are beginning to crowd into the famine kitchens

now being established in various centres. There are already six famine kitchens, with an attendance of at least 1,000 each. Many people are wandering aimlessly about. To prevent this, a regular system of relief has been established. This district is now divided into groups of 30 villages each, under inspectors, whose duty it is to visit each village once a week and examine into cases of distress. At present, only those incapacitated from work by age, sickness or deformity, will be relieved. Many able-bodied persons are starving for lack of work. Since last Christmas I have had about 20, and since March about 30 people employed in breaking stone at Yellamanchili. This stone is being gradually sold at a slight loss, and the money is reinvested in the work. In this way a considerable number, mostly Christians, have been relieved. We feel bound to help Christians first, then heathen as far as the funds will permit. As rains have not properly fallen, the planting of rice has been delayed, and the farmers have employed very little outside help.

The next three weeks will decide the fate of the coming year.

Before leaving for Coonoor, a few months since, I thought that people could not get more emaciated, and still live. But during the last few days I have seen living skeletons. Ask the friends to increase their giving.

The villagers have at last come to realize and confess that this is a visitation of God. They listen with greater interest than ever to the preaching of the Gospel. Pray that, in this opportunity of God's power in this land, man's extremity of physical need may become the source of spiritual fulness to this people."

Mr. Walker showed me yesterday two articles of food now used by many of his Christians as a means of subsistence. A sample of one of them I enclose. It is the ground kernel of the mango fruit. This is made into a porridge, which is about as palatable to these people as a course in boiled corn cobs. It looks for all in the world like so much grey mud. Mr. Walker said it turned his stomach when he tried to taste a bit of it. The other food is the flower of a wild lily that grows in stinking and miasmatic mudholes. Some of them are trying a course in rice-bran. Even a cow will not eat that in good times.

A poor man who was found dying on the roadside, was taken in by Mrs. Walker, who did everything in her power to save his life; but it was too late. He could not swallow. He could hardly speak. Before he died, they found out his village and caste, so as to inform his friends; then they took the poor wasted body out and committed it to the potters' field, a short distance from the bungalow.

We are receiving very few candidates for baptism. Many are applying for the ordinance. We receive only such as we have known long and well, and of whose conversion we have no doubts.