

MISSION FIELD.

FAMINE AND PLAQUE IN INDIA.

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Things in India are still very dark. The famine continues its stress, which must continue for full three or four months yet. The plague, though diminishing in the places first smitten, has greatly extended over the country, and when it will stop no one can predict. The accounts of the conditions often found by the military search-parties who go through the cities like Poona, Kurrachoo, and others, are appalling. Frequently they will knock and get no answer, then enter to find all the inmates lying about the rooms dead.

The worst feature in the situation is the extreme animosity which has been stirred up among all classes of the population by these rigorous search measures. The sacredness of the zenana is invaded! And many, especially of high class Mohammedans are furious, and openly threaten bloodshed and revolt. Individuals in the discharge of this search duty have been assaulted and mobbed, but fortunately none killed as yet. I think the Government, in one of the most difficult possible positions, is acting with an admirable combination of kindness and unswerving firmness. But for all this, we may have trouble more serious, if the strained condition of things continues.

Then in Delhi and elsewhere the Mussulmans are in a state of no little angry tension over the Turkish situation, and England's changed attitude toward the Sultan. We cannot but watch events in the Turkish Empire with specially intense interest. The chief element of security under God, in the present situation, is the feeling of bitter hatred, intensified of late, especially in the Punjab, between the Mohammedans and the Aryas and other Hindoos. In the Punjab, at least, I should think that they were in no temper to unite, even against the hated English power, unless the pressure of the plague regulations drive them to it.

In any case, India in the present crisis, here and in Turkey, claims a very special remembrance in your prayers.

WORK IN INDIA.

The Rev. Norman H. Russell, who has just returned home after seven years work in the mission fields of India, in speaking of the Indian famine said his district was not in the famine region, yet the effects were felt in the doubling of the price of food, which caused a great deal of suffering among the lower classes. This district is in Central India, north of Bombay, and distant twenty-two, hours journey; it is a fine region and never suffers from famine. The wheat crop was very poor last season; other grains were fair. A very large proportion of the people live ordinarily just on the verge of starvation, and hence, just as soon as there is a scarcity they require help. The missionaries try to do what they can to help those who are in need. They are seeking to get orphans from the famine district; but the jealousy of the educated classes, Mohammedans and Hindoos, largely prevents success at present, having resulted in the Government issuing an order that the children are not to be taken out of their own districts. The Mohammedans and Hindu peoples do not like to see the orphans in the hands of Christians; so they are starting orphanages, depending on the Government for funds. Mr. Russell believes that when the Government help ceases at the end of the famine, their zeal will come to an end, and those who have been left orphans will be at the mercy of the public, and the opportunities of the missionaries will have come.

As to the probable duration of the famine, Mr. Russell could only say that it was hoped the stress would be past in a few months. He had just received his mail, and from it learned that in some sections the prospects were good; though nothing definite could be said until after the rains which begin about the middle of June and last until the middle of September.

The Government is doing a great deal for the poor in erecting irrigation works and starting other public works; with the object of giving employment to the poor. The Christians are looked after by the missionaries, and are not in receipt of Government assistance.

To illustrate the misery of the famishing, Mr. Russell says, they will even eat meat sandwiches, and take food from the hands of others, whom to touch it would be considered defilement at other times.

None of the money subscribed by Canadian and other countries had come in before Mr. Russell left. He says that the distribution through over-worked Government officials is not satisfactory, as they have to depend upon native servants, who are not honest. The safest way is to distribute through the missionaries, who can

look after it personally, their districts not being so large. The Chairman of the Bombay Relief Committee was of this opinion, and wrote to the *Bombay Times* advising that money should be distributed through the missionaries as in previous famines this had been found to be the best course.

The climate in Central India, though not as hot as that in some other parts, is still very trying during the hot season and the rains. There are three months in which the climate is delightful; but during the heated periods, the thermometer often reaches 100 to 110 in the shade, and occasionally 120 degrees. The houses are kept cool by means of "tatti," or grass doors kept wet with water; the hot air passing through these becomes cooled.

The work of the missions Mr. Russell states to be very hopeful, promising to gradually cover the whole extent of the territory. A very excellent opening has been presented among the Bhils, an aboriginal tribe. The Governor of the district has promised land and wood for building, also to help with the building as soon as the missionaries are able to enter in. Dr. Buchanan has been set aside for the work, and it is hoped that a beginning will be made, if funds are available, by next December. A new general station, with Mrs. Russell's brother, Rev. J. W. Russell, in charge, and many out stations have been opened. The membership of the church has increased in all the stations, more rapidly during the past few years than ever before. They have now a college, two high schools, very many primary schools, both for boys and for girls, in six stations; and they have also opened up a theological department, in which Rev. Mr. Russell himself takes part. There were seventeen students in attendance the past year on classes in the theological department.

Meetings are held in villages and are attended sometimes by 500 to 1,000 people. When touring about the villages, the missionary sometimes held seven meetings a day. At night he always held meetings, using a magic lantern to illustrate. A very ready hearing was given every where.

There is room for a great many more missionaries. Out of about 1,600,000 people in connection with his own station, Mr. Russell says that himself and his men can only, by working the year round, reach about 60,000.

In the cities and large towns there is an educated class; but the great mass of the people are uneducated. It is, however, among the uneducated that the most fruit is seen; the educated classes are, as a rule, proud and prejudiced. The great enemy is caste. People who become Christians are driven out of their caste, lose their work and receive no employment; the village water is shut off, they are not allowed to take it; and they are disowned by their families.

The tremendous, indirect effects of Christianity are to be seen in many ways, through its teaching many evil practices have been done away to a great extent, such as the burning of widows, the sacrificing of children to the Ganges, the modifying of caste prejudices. The educated classes have come to acknowledge the superiority of Christianity, and to acknowledge Christ as a prophet, and the Bible as a very worthy book. Hence at any time a great movement may take place; if a number of the leaders become Christians, multitudes will follow.

Mr. Russell speaks very highly of the India government as one of the best governments in the world, and having many capable and self-sacrificing officials. Some of the military officers, who were earnest Christians, have done much good by the stand they have taken, their influence being more marked from the fact that they were not paid missionaries. But while as a rule, the official is a very superior man and does his work most conscientiously, there are those among the officials, military and civic, and among the British soldiers, those whose habits are a great hindrance to Christianity.

The plague, while decreasing in Bombay, is spreading. Mr. Russell regrets to learn, in the surrounding villages. Every possible measure of relief has been taken, but the doctors do not seem to understand it or be able to find a remedy. It was sad, he says, to see in Bombay about Christmas time, the effects in the depopulation of whole streets that were once thronged with human life and now as silent as the grave. Elsewhere shops were closed, business had to cease, and even newspapers could not be issued. Half of Bombay had fled. The contagion was thought to be in the soil, as the first sign of the coming of the plague was the dying of the rats and mice.

Mr. Russell expects to remain in Canada until a year from next October, visiting through the Dominion, holding meetings and giving information for the benefit of the missionary work. He will probably make Toronto his headquarters the most of the time. He will remain in Winnipeg until after the meeting of the General Assembly, which will take place in June.