

THE FAMINE IN INDIA.

INDIA is now suffering from one of these famines, to which it has always been liable. So regular has their occurrence been that it is regarded as a fact with which the Government must reckon, that once in every five years scarcity more or less severe will be experienced in some portion of the empire, while once in every twenty years such scarcity will deepen into famine.

The cause of these famines is the partial or complete failure of the Monsoon rains, upon which the farmers depend for the production of their crops.

At the best times there is only a narrow margin which separates a certain proportion of the people from starvation, and a failure of the crops at once plunges them into distress.

At the present time over five and a half millions of people in India are in receipt of famine relief, that is a number greater than the whole population of Ireland or of Scotland, and three times the number of the inhabitants of Wales.

In the Indian famine of 1896-7 two and a half million people died of starvation—a number exceeding half the population of Ireland.

The present famine affects a much larger area than the last did, and in most of the districts concerned distress is increasing in intensity.

At a meeting held in Calcutta the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, said :—"If any rich man in this city is in any doubt as to whether he should subscribe, I would gladly give him a railway ticket to a famine district, and take what he chose to give me on his return. *He might go with a hard heart, but he would come back with a broken one.* Nor need any poor man desist from offering his mite. *A mite to him may be almost a fortune to the starving.*"

The Indian Government is doing its utmost to meet the wants of the sufferers, but as it only professes to aim at saving life and nothing more, much remains to be done by private charity.

In the poor-houses near the large towns the people are better provided for, but in other places the feeling arises in ones mind that the people appear more like beasts than human beings. Covered (?) only with the scantiest of rags, which in no way hide their emaciated limbs, the poor sufferers fall at your feet asking for clothes or saying that the food does not satisfy their hunger.

All natural ties and affections seem to fail at a time like this : sons who are able to earn something run away and leave their mothers ; parents refuse to share their food with their children and even desert them* ; husbands de-

sert their wives. It seems just an individual struggle for existence.

Experience has again and again shown that on the part of petty Hindu officials there is a distinct tendency to pass over outcasts in distributing famine relief. Moreover on some of the relief works the people when paid buy their food from the *bunnias*, who open their stalls there. These men are absolutely unscrupulous, they have every device for giving short measure, they mix dirt and stones with the grain, and taking the money first before anything is supplied, frequently afterwards insist that no payment has been made, and thus rob the people.

Thankful indeed are the starving people when an Englishman investigates their cases. It is here that the agency of the missionaries proves so valuable.

No more striking proof could be given of the depth of love inspired by the life of Jesus than clear evidence that the Christian in his acts of sympathy has learnt to disregard the barriers of race and creed.

On the last two occasions the famine funds raised by the Society (£17,747 in 1877-8 and about £5,000 in 1897-8), and so wisely administered by its missionaries, provided for the relief of over 100,000 sufferers, without respect to race, cast or creed, and for the maintenance of hundreds of orphans.

Can we imagine anything nearer the heart of the Master than the feeding and clothing of these little helpless perishing ones and bringing them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord? Some may question this or that phase of religious work, but probably none will be found to say that the rescuing of these poor starvelings and training them up for Him is not mission work in its truest and best sense.

Some heathen, on seeing the missionaries engaged in rescuing a group of starving children, exclaimed : "Oh ! this is God's work ; who but the Padri Sahibs put their hands to work of this kind. There must be something in your religion that impels you to do work of this kind. God's blessing is sure to rest on your head."

One of the noblest of lives is now being lived by a woman who at an early stage of her career was such a starving and perishing orphan ; with a heart full of love and gratitude to the Master whom she has since learnt to love and serve, she is now devoting her life to the rescuing and training of such famine orphans. God has entrusted a goodly number of such to her, and right nobly is she training them up for His honour and glory.—*The Gospel Missionary*.

HEART failure is what the Church of God is dying of not head failure.

*An illustration of this was given in the *Gospel Missionary* for March last.