

The India Famine.

I am writing from the east coast of India, in the extreme north of the Madras Presidency, where it joins borders with Lower Bengal, and where in three of her 22 districts, the Presidency throws an arm 300 miles long up the east boundary of the Central Provinces, shutting them out from the sea coast of the Bay of Bengal by a strip of land only 100 miles in width. The famine is milder here than in other parts. The pressure of famine is gauged by the prevailing price of the food grains. In these parts the staple food grain is rice. In ordinary times rice sells at 14 measures to the rupee. That means about 28 lbs. for 30 cts., or speaking roughly, one cent a pound. At the present time, in many places, rice cannot be had at any price. Famine prices are about 7 measures to a rupee, or twice the ordinary rates. That is the prevailing price in these parts at present. But in the worst famine districts, rice has risen to 3½ measures to the rupee. This means a quadrupling of the distress that poor people feel even in ordinary times. How these rates pinch, yes kill, can be inferred from facts set forth in a publication of the Indian Government for March of 1892. In that publication, the absolute necessities of life, food, clothing and house of an agricultural laborer, not including extras in the Punjab, are put at Rs. 34 a year. Calculated at three rupees to the dollar, that means \$11.30. This amount is reduced in the warmer parts of India to Rs. 30 (\$10). While that is the income a native of India requires to support life and health, it is by no means what he always receives. No less a financial authority than Sir David Barbour states that the highest income is received in the Central Provinces viz. Rs. 30½ (\$10.16), or just 16 cts. above the actual necessities of life. That falls in the Northwest Provinces and Cudhe to the lowest for all India, or Rs. 22¼, (\$7.40), or \$2.60 below the absolute necessities of life.

The famine returns vindicate the truthfulness of these statements as regards these provinces. When 4¼ millions were on government relief, the Northwest Provinces and Cudhe bulked so largely in that total as to contribute 1,750,000, leaving 2½ millions to the remaining seven provinces or presidencies.

The average income for all India is Rs. 27, (\$), per head, per annum. In comparison with the United Kingdom, in which the average individual income is £4. 3s. 2½d., in excess of the high standard of comfort in food and profuseness in material things, India shows a minus of 2s. 3d. below the actual necessities in very plain food and scant clothing, to which her poverty compels her. As compared to English life, Indian life is very short. The difference between the conditions of life in India and Canada may be illustrated by drawing one line for Canada, three inches and five eighths long and placing over that the sum of \$135 as representing the average annual income of the Canadian individual. Then below that draw a line ¼ of an inch long, and place over it the sum of \$9 to represent the annual average income per capita in India. The gaping discrepancy makes it easy to believe the statement published in "The Globe" some time since, that 40,000,000 of the people of India in times of plenty lie down every night on a mud floor and an empty stomach. If, in times of such questionable plenty, so many eke out such a miserable existence, on fare so meagre, what must their conditions be when the ordinary sources of income dry up, and food prices rise to four times their normal value? That means indescribable and widespread disaster. Such a disaster as this has overtaken India in this year of jubilee.

The statement of an English planter from India quoted in the "Globe" some time since, that no deaths had taken place in India as the result of famine, or from starvation, indicates prodigious ignorance

or monstrous mendacity. True statistics are difficult to secure, but the death rate in some provinces has been very high. The plague in Bombay and its vicinity would not have been so virulent had not the weakened condition of the people exasperated its fierceness. 20,000 perished in Bombay alone. While the deaths hitherto have been very numerous, the real testing of the resisting power of the people lies just ahead, under the trying condition of the first heavy rains in many months.

In all parts of India cholera is now claiming its annual harvest of victims. What that may mean with the conditions altogether favorable may be gathered from the history of the year, 92, 1892 was a particularly bad year for cholera. With a population of 287¼ millions, India lost that year some 10 millions of her people. Out of that vast multitude cholera claimed close on toward 1,000,000 victims. The roots and wood, the jungle berries and barks, the grass and other stuff that the people have been subsisting on, together with the vile water they have been compelled to use, or go without, has so upset them, that from the chronic diarrhoea and dysentery induced by these harsh foods to cholera is a very short step indeed.

The number of people who die from actual want of food is small compared to the deaths which result from the greater hold which disease gets on those who are enfeebled by the diminution of their usual supply of nutriment. Famine is most felt in the first four or five years of life. It then seems to pass lightly over the adults, and to fix on the aged, but only where the distress is acute.

India has had a long schooling in famine. The government has been attending to the lessons of that school only during the last thirty years. Now, as a consequence there is a more or less adequate provision made to save the poorest from actual death by starvation, and the mass of the poorer classes from hopeless bankruptcy. Their first work of relief is to remit the taxes in part or whole where the crops have failed. They then divert the expenditure on public works, from that which may require skilled and expensive labor, to the building of roads, the digging of canals and other works which will benefit all classes. In addition to these, which reach only the able bodied, the children and the aged

must be provided for. Relief doles are distributed gratuitously for these in their own villages, or where possible, they are all collected in some central place, where a famine kitchen is opened and the starving fed twice a day with cooked food.

As mentioned previously in this letter, famine is not pressing so hard here as in other parts, and yet even here, were it not for the bounteous provision made by outsiders the state of affairs would be much more serious than at present. Were it not for the help provided from all parts of Christendom, which must now aggregate about \$5,000,000, including the Indian contributions, the government would despair to cope with the calamity that has overtaken the country.

Only a fraction over three millions are not engaged on relief works or are receiving gratuitous relief. This number gradually diminishes with the steady of the monsoon rains which for a time were very uncertain. The cabled number on government relief, by no means represent the total number receiving help. Private beneficence has been magnificent. A Mr. Bassavaredi, a native merchant in this place has daily fed about 500 of the very poor. This is insignificant compared with what some of the native princes have been doing. A number of merchants in the town here have formed a syndicate to feed as many poor as come to eat. At eleven in the night when the streets are empty, they feed about a thousand vagrants. In fact the rich got so liberal that no one would go on the relief works opened in the town to provide the poor with employment, and the municipal chairman was constrained to ask them to be more discreet in their charity or they would swamp the town under a load of cholera breeding paupers. As it is we number only 47,000 of a population, and yet in the last ten days out of 90 cholera cases, 60 have gone over to the burning grounds.

Our own two Canadian Baptist missions have sent out for distribution some \$7,000, many of our own poor Christians have been saved from possible starvation, and a lot of small land holders amongst them, from losing their earthly all. That, in many cases means death. We hope the worst is now past. But that has been so bad that we are yet far from being able to get on without further help. Yours very truly,

H. P. LA FLAMME.

Cocanada, India, July 27th.

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According to a despatch from Moscow to the Daily Mail, Lieutenant General Baron Von Schack has committed suicide by shooting himself with a revolver at Odessa in a fit of repentance. He was a member of the German Lutheran body. His religious connections excited the suspicion of his superiors and they ordered him to resign or to join the Russian church. He chose the latter course and then killed himself in remorse.



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