

MILLIONS STARVING TO DEATH

The Direful Results of the Famine in India.

Inhabitants to the Number of 300,000,000 Occupy a District Less Than Half the Size of Canada.

Above the noise of everyday events the clamor of political intriguers, the din of more or less disreputable warfare, the cry of starving India, increasing in volume from day to day, so demands for itself a hearing that it can no longer be disregarded. How much longer the lives of white men in the outlying districts will be safe, while the natives are experiencing death in its most ghastly forms, is a question which is beginning to agitate that portion of the public mind which is personally interested in the fate of that unhappy country. White men are already regarded by the ignorant classes as responsible for a great amount of the suffering; but, while there may be grounds for complaint, it is certain that no nation would have accomplished more than has England while laboring at such a disadvantage. Of course, mistakes have been made. In the distant past, conditions, to a certain extent, righted themselves. During years of drought, followed by famine, the population was so decimated that in the succeeding years of plenty there was an abundance for all. But, as it was noted that the drought usually affected but one or two provinces at a time, the government caused the poorer people to be moved around from place to place, thus preserving life, until, at present, in a territory but little over half as large as the Dominion of Canada, there is a population of 300,000,000 of people. During the last two years the drought has become general and now 130,000,000 are suffering from the famine which, with slow insistence, seems likely to desolate the entire country. In its wake follow bubonic plague, cholera and smallpox. The germs of all these diseases find the best of soil for development in the feverish, impoverished bodies of the starving people. And now the water supply has become so short that, with the limited means of transportation, it is difficult to send a sufficient supply into the localities where it is entirely exhausted to enable each inhabitant to receive even a few drops daily.

Early in the history of the famine masses of the people traded all their worldly possessions for bread. Next, many of them sold their girls to the Mohammedans, receiving in return, in some instances, but 35 cents. The boys are not marketable and are turned adrift and may be seen in great, homeless groups, sometimes 50 together, literally starving to death. They eagerly lick up the sweepings of the granhouses, and are so emaciated as to be hardly recognizable as human beings.

The natives may blame themselves largely for existing conditions. They refuse to adopt modern methods of farming. The English government is doing its utmost, but the people often refuse to be placed on the relief list until too weak to recover. The viceroy recently declared that conditions are steadily growing worse. The plague is spreading alarmingly and another drought is threatened. He announces his intention to spend all the money in the treasury for the relief of the sufferers. Outside contributions have been made but available funds are inadequate to meet demands.

A full-grown man at the relief works may only receive 4 cents per day. However, 5 cents daily will keep a Hindoo alive indefinitely, for, in his land, the supporting of life on a minimum of cheapest food has been reduced to an art. A few grains of rice, supplemented with roots and grass seed, will furnish him a fair meal. When the garrison of the British fort at the siege of Lucknow were reduced to daily rations of four ounces of corn made into gruel, some of the Hindoo auxiliaries offered to live for a week on the water in which the corn was boiled. If the whole civilized world unite in the work of assisting people who are satisfied with so little the worst features of this famine, the details of which are too horrible to describe or read, would be alleviated.

To their abstemiousness, the English are largely in debt for the loyalty of the native soldiers. Each man knows that when his time of usefulness has expired the government guarantee of a pension sufficient to purchase a yearly suit of white cotton, and rice for his daily meals, is assurance of a sufficient provision for his old age. The religion

of the country prohibits the use of animal food. As available funds for the relief committee are only sufficient to reach about 15 per cent of the sufferers it is feared that wandering groups may resolve themselves into armies of bandits who, having disposed of their homes through want, will for years constitute a menace to the safety of the more fortunate inhabitants of India. Crowds of distressed human beings are daily streaming into the cities, and even in Bombay people without means of obtaining food starve in the streets. Famine prices prevail. Owing to financial depression mills are closed down and in many cases the wages of those still employed have been reduced. What sufficed perhaps for mere existence in prosperous times means now slow starvation covering a period of weeks or even months. Those dying in cities are buried in ditches, if in the open country they lie where they fall. Near some of the relief works men are constantly engaged in burning bodies, often large numbers of them together. It is a fearful sight, but seems the only way of protecting the living.

The suffering seems to be largely among the agricultural classes of which 80 per cent of the population of India is composed. Large sections of the arable lands depend entirely for their productiveness upon irrigation, the source of which is in rivers and streams which are supplied by rains. Every recorded Indian famine may be traced to failure of rainfall. A number of years ago the Indian forester announced his theory that the responsibility for droughts might be placed upon the great herds of goats—sometimes 15,000 or 20,000—always apparently starving, which attacks the shoots of every young tree in the course of their depredations. Thus when old trees die off there are no young ones to take their places. Rains, which depend so largely upon the existence of forests, fall short, then famine and plague follow. The early rains come in June, are known as the southwest monsoons and originate in vapors drawn from the Indian ocean and the Arabic sea. Breaking on the Malabar coast for three months, they may be expected to flood India; the average fall of water being about 100 inches. At such times crops are abundant. But when these rains fail, as was the case last year, famine is the result. The "later" rains or northeast monsoons arrive in November and December from the Bay of Bengal. These also failed last year. Insufficient rainfall may be expected at intervals of from five to 25 years. Existing conditions are the worst recorded. The present drought, following so closely that of 1897, has rendered the ground so dry that there is a scarcity of water, even for drinking purposes, heretofore unknown.

Bluffers at Nome.

Reports of mistreatment of newcomers at Nome by men who have been there some time, and who operate in a clique to keep the chechakos from taking gold from the beach are given, says the Alaskan, by George W. Hazen, who has returned from Nome. He says:

"Men wearing badges and parading as marshals, and without authority go up and down the beach, and if they see a man taking out gold they will tell him to get, and he must go. It is simply a big case of bluff, and the bluffers are sour doughs imposing on tenderfeet.

"Many men went prospecting in various directions and came back disgusted. It seems there are a few good creek claims, but nothing more, and they are shallow. The reported new strikes are no good.

"It was expected by many they would be able to at least wash out enough to get a ticket back to the Sound, but they are disappointed in that. The government will have to take back many.

"It is not a great and thrifty camp such as is found in a place of a big output. The merchants and gambling houses are not doing much, which is sufficient proof of the matter. Eating houses and hotels, of course, are doing a rushing business.

"The tundra is just like so many wet sponges.

"Water used in the camp is taken from the tundra.

"I went to Nome with a certain purpose and having succeeded in that I am going home.

"I wrote a letter aboard the Farallon setting forth my views in general, and the passengers as a whole passed on them, and said I was more than conservative."

Feeding England's Vast Army.

After water, which is literally the crying need at all times and everywhere, the demand is for bread. Happily the British commissariat supplies the ingredients of the staff of life in fair quality and abundant quantity; and the regimental or camp bake-ovens do the rest: it is a sight which does good to the eyes of the hungry men, whose appetites

are as stalwart as their bodies, to see the bread spread out on the ground in trays fresh from the field ovens, or loaded high in the wagons at the stations ready for transport to the camps. The men selected for service at the ovens are drawn largely from the Indian contingent, and they know how to produce a wholesome article. Of course there are other things besides bread and water, though often the soldier must be content with these when he is moving about rapidly. A regular British army ration for a day includes a pound of bread, a pound and a half of meat, coffee and seasonings. To such things there is usually added the long list of toothsome viands and edibles which the modern canning industry has brought within the reach of the whole world—corn, tomatoes, fish, berries, apples, beef and sauce. Fresh beef and mutton have been a rare visitation at the mess tables in South Africa until latterly, when the transport service has been under better organization and train loads of cattle and sheep have been brought in from the outlying country. In some parts of Natal and the Orange Free State the resident population have always depended chiefly on stock raising, and their flocks and herds have come in handy as a food supply for the invading army. The British army authorities, however, have been exceedingly scrupulous in the matter of securing forage, and will tolerate neither stealing nor looting from defenseless and innocent people. All supplies taken from the inhabitants are either paid for on the spot or payment is arranged for on a reasonable basis.—Leslie's Weekly.

The Deacon's Scheme.

Opposite the railroad depot there was a grocery kept by a colored man, and we had some time to wait for the train three or four of us crossed over to look at his stock. Business was very brisk with the merchant, though all his customers were colored. We noticed that sugar, tea and codfish seemed to sell above all else, and during a temporary lull the colonel approached the battered old scales on which everything was weighed and picked up some of the weights. The hollow in each one had been filled with lead, and when quite sure that the pound weight would balance 20 ounces at least he said to the old man:

"I see you have filled your weights with lead."

"Yes, sah; yes, sah," he replied as he rubbed his hands together.

"What was the idea?"

"To keep the dirt out o' de holes, sah. Can't no dirt git in dar now."

"Was it your own idea?"

"No, sah. I never should hev got dat idea if it hadn't bin fur Deacon Williams. De deacon said it was de way dey did down in Greenville, an he fixed 'em up fur me widout cost."

"The deacon buys all his groceries here, doesn't he?"

"He do, sah; yes, sah, he buys 'em all yere, an he was tellin me only dis mawnin dat he neber did see de beat o' how dem groceries held out."

He was advised to take his weights over to the cotton warehouse and have them weighed, and he picked them up and in a slow walk and very much puzzled he proceeded to the warehouse. When he returned, it was on the run and his eyes hanging out, and as he reached the store he exclaimed:

"No wonder I has gone into bankruptcy fo'teen times an had to sell my mews in a hogs an make de ole woman go har'tut! Dat air pound weight weighs 22 ounces, an every time Deacon Williams has bought two pounds o' sugar an codfish he has taken away three pounds an a half! Shoo, but I ze gwine to close de doan an put up a sign o' 'Busted Ag'in'!"

M. QUAD.

Will Stay With It.

Alex Mathews, well known by all Western Washingtonians as an ex-sheriff of Pierce county, who has been in the Klondike since the fall of '97, is in the city from his claim on Sulphur, where he has a large lot of mining machinery which he believes will yet enable him to leave the Klondike a rich man. As none are more deserving than he, it is hoped his fondest expectations will be fully and speedily realized.

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