

IMPENDING FAMINE IN BENGAL.

GOVERNMENT WORKS TO BE CONSTRUCTED AS A MEASURE OF RELIEF.

By the arrival of the India mail we have advices from Bombay to Nov. 3. The *Gazette* of that date says that the all-absorbing topic of the day is the impending famine in Bengal, of the expected severity of which it continues to receive reports. "We have previously published (it adds) a few melancholy notes from Tirhoot showing that the want of rain had interfered with the prospects of the crops, and disheartened the ryots from sowing, in consequence of the hardness of the ground; but further accounts from various parts of Bengal serve to show that there is more and more fear of a direful calamity in store. Not merely has the rain fall of the past season been inefficient, but during the previous year also the supply was considerably below the average, and the crops consequently small, so that the surplus in hand at the commencement of the season was inconsiderable. It is therefore to be feared that the scarcity will be far greater than during the famine of 1865-66, when the preceding year's crop had been bountiful. The drought moreover, on the present occasion has been more extended, and Orissa is almost the sole district of Lower Bengal which has escaped the scourge. To the honor of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell, be it spoken, that he has not hesitated to grapple with the difficulty, and he is straining every nerve to meet the occasion. On Saturday last he started from Hazreebagh for Patna, where he arrived almost without halting, there to concert measures of relief with the Commissioner, and at Luckee Sorai he has to await the arrival of the Viceroy, who, alarmed at the state of affairs, started suddenly from Simla, on Friday, to consult with Sir George. From Patna the two dignitaries will proceed to Calcutta. A telegram received on Thursday informs us that it is rumored that the Government has authorized the commencement of the Darjeeling Railway and the further extension of the Soane Canal, as relief works. Rice has risen in Bengal some 30 per cent. in value, and even in Bombay the price has been enhanced."

The *Calcutta Englishman* writes as follows:

Whatever may be the probable or possible extent of the calamity that appears to be threatening Bengal in the partial failure of its food supplies, there can be no doubt that the promptitude and energy displayed by Sir George Campbell in preparing to meet and provide for the worst are deserving of all praise. He has already visited that part of the country about which the worst apprehensions are entertained, and personally enquired into the present condition of affairs and the best means of providing for the future; and at the present moment the elaboration of remedial measures is engaging his anxious attention. We hope, and believe, that the situation is on the whole not so gloomy as some of our contemporaries would have it to be; but it is beyond all question sufficiently critical to demand the most careful consideration, and to warrant very large and liberal schemes of relief on the part of the Government. Sir George Campbell's movements show that he feels and duly appreciates the responsibility that is thrown upon him; and we believe that we only express the general feeling of the public when we congratulate the country for hav-

ing such a ruler at such a time. Many minor faults of pseudo vigorous government will be atoned for by the true vigour which we all believe the Lieutenant-Governor to be capable of displaying in seasons of real emergency. His Honor doubtless feels that such an occasion will afford him the best possible opportunity of vindicating the general character of his Administration; and without discussing the value of such a vindication as such, all Bengal will certainly sympathize with him most heartily in his attempts, and will be ready as heartily to applaud him on their success. But vigor without discretion is very apt to defeat itself; and inasmuch as we believe that Sir George Campbell's public acts have savored oftener of vigor than of discretion, it is on the latter point that we wish to take up our pen this morning. We come to caution Caesar, not to praise him. One of our contemporaries, who takes the gloomiest view of the state of the food supplies, allows his imagination to run riot in devising all manner of relief-works for the districts that are most likely to be famine stricken. Irrigation, local railways, tramways, and we know not what other castles in the air, are immediately to be set on foot in Behar to mitigate the severity of the famine which is certain to press hard on that part of the province; and all those suggestions—which might fire the enthusiasm of less enthusiastic statesmen than the Lieutenant-Governor—are made apparently with very little deference to the actual effects extensive relief works undertaken in districts cut off from all possibility of obtaining an adequate food supply. Public money will be distributed among the famishing peasantry; and this is apparently all that is thought necessary by our contemporary. Now, such a measure is obviously highly effectual in a district where food, though at a very high price, attracts further supplies of grain, even at a higher price, what are the effects of extensive relief works? The increased aggregate of wages only has the effect of raising the price of the hoards of grain actually available in the country, generally to more than the full extent of the increase; that portion of the peasantry that can benefit from the relief works is hardly better off than before, because of the rise of prices; the rest of the peasantry are far worse off, and by their efforts to avoid starvation (for starving men will pay any price they can for food), aggravate the famine by raising still further; and not only all the money expended on the relief works, but also much of the original scanty store of peasantry will be swallowed up in the famine profits of the holders of grain. Of course there is no part of either Behar or Bengal so utterly cut off from external supplies as that we have pictured; but the demand for these supplies is likely to be so enormous in the most afflicted districts that all ordinary sources will be drained dry, and all ordinary means of transport are likely to be found insufficient; in which case the condition of those districts will be not very unlike that which we have supposed above, a condition that was almost fully realized for a time in Orissa in 1866. The obvious moral of all this is that the first thing to which Government should look is the provision of as ample means of transporting rice into the afflicted districts as can possibly be obtained; the second is the establishment of Government granaries at accessible places, stocked with all the rice that can be obtained at a reasonable rate in more fortunate Provinces; and it is only after these points have been attended to, that relief works can be set on foot with any but

disastrous results. It is true that the management of Government granaries as competitors with the bunnias during the time of famine is a subject of the greatest difficulty and delicacy—on which we may have something to say hereafter, but experience has proved that the difficulties may be successfully coped with. But, as we have attempted to show above, the most important point of all is the amount of cheap transport available; if this be provided to a large extent at the public cost, private enterprise will do much to mitigate the horrors of any but the most wide spread famine.

The latest official reports represent the state of the crops in Bengal as rather worse than the previous week. In many districts the crops on high ground were believed to be past remedy. Prices were generally rising. —*London Daily News*, Nov. 24.

The new edition of the *Encyclopædi Britannica*, now in course of preparation, will it is said, cost the publishers \$1,000,000.

Her Majesty the Queen has, upon recommendation of Mr. Gladstone, granted to Lady McClure, the widow of the discoverer of the North-west passage, a pension of £100 per annum from the civil list. The late Vice Admiral, Sir R. McClure, died intestate consequently his widow only became entitled to one third of the property, which was sworn under £5,000.

The *Vase Publica*, of Matamoras, states that claims exceeding one hundred millions of dollars have been presented before the Frontier Commissioners, as indemnification for depredations and injuries inflicted on American citizens on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande.

A special from Paris to a London morning journal says the defeat of the Government on the vote in relation to the appointment of Mayors, is not to be considered important. A vote of confidence in the Government was to be asked for yesterday, which, it was said, was certain to be carried.

In the French assembly on Monday evening, after a long and violent debate on the Ministry on their monarchical tendencies, a vote of confidence in the Government was adopted by a majority of fifty eight. They have in consequence withdrawn their resignations.

A board of Enquiry to ascertain the cause of the sinking of *Virginus* is in session at the Navy Department, at Washington.

Five pieces of captured French bronze cannon have arrived in Baltimore as a present from the Emperor William of Germany to St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. They are to be melted for a church bell.

Southern people are trying to raise for subscription the sum of \$20,000, which remains unpaid upon the statue of "Stonewall" Jackson, now completed at Nuremberg, Bavaria.

The exhibition building at Vienna is not to be destroyed, but is to be converted into a permanent museum and a place of industry.

General Sir John Fitzgerald, of the British army, recently celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the date of his first commission.