

"Millions Fight With Death"

By ROSALIND COFORTH.

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Words fail one to make plain to the home friends what this famine really means. It is doubtful whether there has ever been a famine when so many souls were involved. The estimates have varied from thirty to forty millions. Even taking the lower figure, it means four times the population of Canada, helpless and starving apart from outside aid. In 1887 a terrible famine occurred in the province of Shantung when it is said 70 per cent. of the people died. While we now have greater facilities for reaching the people, yet the area is vastly greater, and robber bands, scouring many parts of the affected region, increase tremendously the difficulties of relief work. At a recent Famine Relief Conference Dr. P. C. Leslie, the Treasurer for famine funds, "In a hush that could be felt," stated, "there is no human possibility in sight to carry the worst sufferers straight through." And at the Pekin Famine Conference it was clearly stated that, "Unless money continued to flow in till next May, the sufferings of millions would but be prolonged in vain."

The following brief extracts from a few of the many letters reaching me almost daily from missionaries in the famine area, will speak better than I can tell of what famine and relief work really means:

"So many thanks for your letter with enclosed cheque. I hope that you will remember us in prayer, for it is really heart-rending to hear about the sufferings of the poor people. We have had a long spell of bitterly cold weather and much snow . . . so many people have died from starvation and cold. . . . Two Christian women came to-day, one nearly blind and the other with a three-year-old boy whose feet were badly frost-bitten, and a small baby. One of our Christian men had carried the boy and helped the blind woman; the younger one carrying the baby. They had tramped in the bitter cold and snow over thirty-three miles to get to us, and would have all died of starvation had they remained at home."

"How can I express my joy, when I received your letter. This afternoon I had prayed to God for help, and my prayer was: 'Father you know all about us. If it pleases Thee, wilt Thou this day send a proof that we are not forgotten.' And in the afternoon your letter and cheque came. Thank you and thank you, and again I thank you. This has greatly strengthened my faith. . . . The people have got nothing and many starve to death. I have two little five months' old babies in my room and two about five or six years old. The Chinese woman who helps to look after these

children sleeps on my bed. My co-worker has three of the older girls sleeping on her floor. . . . We do feel so happy to do this, so as to make room for as many as possible."

"Many thanks for your letter with enclosed cheque. I was greatly distressed about all these women and girls. Only a little over a month since the famine became acute. All our resources were gone. There could be no thought of sending the children back to their homes where they could get nothing to eat, so we just cried to the Lord, and then your letter and cheque came."

"This money has come just at an opportune time. Three young men had been in from the Neichin district, appealing to me for help for their village, which had come absolutely to the end of their food supplies. I had told them that I could not help them, but they had not left when your welcome letters arrived bringing the four cheques; so I was able to give these men millet to take home. These last twelve days the distress has become much intensified on account of the heavy snow and the intense cold following, and numbers who have existed till now are dying off in quantities."

"In one of our districts it is said that eight out of ten of the women are without protection. Robbers are already carrying off some of the young women to sell them. Their husbands have either died of the cholera when it was raging in September, or they have gone off with the robbers, or have simply gone away to seek food and work and left their families to starve. Fairs are held, not for the carrying on of business (for there is none), but for the sale of young children and older girls."

"School children and indeed all of us pray with new meaning nowadays, 'Lord give us this day our daily bread.' Truly we need the joy of the Lord these days, or we could not keep on. Yesterday it was pitiful to see two old men both over seventy, simply crawl into the main courtyard and cry for help—literally starving by inches. At a station not far from us, eight corpses were found on the slow train of famine refugees who had died en route from the cold."

But enough! Surely these are sufficient to give us some idea of the awfulness of the situation. It would be well for us to remember, too, that all missionaries working or living in close proximity to the famine sufferers are in real peril, and need our special support by prayer. Famine fever is very deadly and is sure to become prevalent when the weather becomes warmer. Already we are hearing of epidemics breaking out among the people. Shall not we who are spared these sights and the hardships and dangers of relief work, do all in our power to uphold our brethren and sisters, both foreign and Chinese, who are now carrying on this life-saving work, both by sending the wherewithal to carry on this work and by upholding them by prayer.

There is just one bright glint that may be given in this dark picture. Already we see that good has come out of this calamity. The very highest Chinese officials of the land are seeking help of the Christian missionaries and working with them in the one common cause. There could not be a better proof given of the sincerity and loving purpose of the missionaries than just this famine relief work. There is no doubt at all but that a very wide door into the hearts of the Chinese people will be opened as a result of this terrible famine; for the Chinese

people all over the country, high and low, know how missionaries are spending without stint strength and money to save their people.