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Res Judicatæ

A MEDICAL MISSIONARY

TO a great extent the revolution and the famine in China have brought out more vividly the "what's the use" of some phases of missionary life, for the missionary has been truly "a very present help in time of trouble." For a nation the size of China, with its immense ignorant population, it is a wonderful, almost incredible, thing that there has been relatively little bloodshed during the civil war; the loss of life has been less than in some single great battles in history. With the exception of the battles at Hankow, there has been very little real warfare, and one can scarcely believe a dynasty has been overthrown and a republic born. No human being can tell what will yet be the outcome; China has given the world many big surprises before this and no doubt there are more "up her sleeve."

Although my station is two thousand miles interior on the banks of the Yangste, yet I have had the privilege of doing Red Cross work one thousand five hundred miles down the river at Hankow, and famine relief work some five hundred miles farther, on the line of the Grand Canal, because consular pressure compelled me to leave the province of Szechuan and to come down river. No attempt will be made to describe the dreadful sights of the gloomy, blackened, desolate, crushed, and deserted city; the scenes of carnage and rapine will be mentioned only to show how seriously the affair was regarded by other nations: there were fourteen war vessels belonging to England, Germany, America, France, and Russia at anchor off the Bund, and on shore the soldiers and marines of these countries continuously guarded the streets. In the foreign concessions, every street corner was guarded by maxime guns surrounded by fortifications of brick, dirt, or stone—every street leading from the native city being walled up with brick. When the hospitals were visited one soon found the earnest for all the formidable preparations; it was dreadful indeed.

The wounded were so numerous and the wounds so serious that it was necessary to improvise hospitals, which were manned chiefly by missionary physicians, although the Germans, Japanese, and Chinese had opened work as well. Warehouses were utilized for impromptu hospitals, and even a church was used: the benches forming the beds in the latter case and the large shelves in the case

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of the former. There were two Red Cross societies at work; the president of one, Dr. MacWillie, was a Canadian, and the executive head of the other—while the writer was in Hankow— was Dr. Barrie, also a Canadian. My work was in the large, unfinished building of the International Hospital. It was very crowded; the patients were chiefly soldiers, both imperial and revolutionary; only a few had beds, most of them were on the floor, lying so close together that one could not step between them, sixteen patients being in a room measuring twenty by fifteen feet. The patients were clothed, as a rule, in the same clothes in which they were wounded some weeks before; all smoked *ad lib.;* they also brought all kinds of food, and had clothes, food, tobacco, money, and various other articles—including matches, pipes, bowls, and chopsticks—all piled about them, and with the well-known propensities of the Chinese for spitting and blowing noses, and their other uncleanly habits, certainly the first sight was nauseating; when one adds to all this the reek of the putrid wounds and the smell of iodoform the picture seems bad enough, but the odour was beyond description.

Hospital work in China is not as it is at home. The Chinese, as a rule, dreadfully fear the knife, and that combined with beliefs and supersitions founded on religion makes the life of the surgeon no bed of roses, and cleanliness, even in a well-conducted missionary hospital is only obtained under constant vigilance. The following instance is an example of the way the higher class Chinaman regards surgery: at the present time President Yuan Shi Kai's son is ill, resulting from a blow on the head caused by a fall from a horse. The president sent to Shangai for Dr. Sharp of the Harvard Medical School of China. The doctor was informed there would be no operation, because the blood of a son of heaven must not be contaminated by the hands of the surgeon,—it was already pure, and healing would result!

To return to our Hankow patients, many of them were in a dreadful condition resulting from various causes, chiefly because they did not receive proper treatment early enough after being wounded; that is, they were not found, or refused assistance, or would not allow the surgeon to do what he thought best, or, worst of all, had been treated by Chinese doctors before they entered the hospital. There were ununited fractures of all of the long bones caused by bullets and shells, practically every one infected, the whole limb being a collection of pus cavities, the fascia and muscles dividing the different foci and, at times, the whole shaft bathed in a continuous pocket of evil-smelling pus. It was surprising how

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many would allow you to operate after they became thoroughly acquainted and after a few had been successfully operated upon,—in fact, before the end there were less than ten who were not operated upon as the surgeon wished, and all had been operated upon to some extent. As a result there were only two deaths in six weeks. At the end of six weeks, the fighting having stopped, the temporary hospitals were closed and the remaining patients distributed to the missionary hospitals.

As to treatment, we did from sixty to one hundred dressings a day, and our method was free incision, after application of tincture of iodine to the site of the cut, flushing very freely with weak pot. perm. solution. Drainage tubes and dressing as usual. One case had rubber tubes totalling one and a half yards. There were, of course, many amputations and more bone operations. One of the leading missionary surgeons told me he had had at least twenty cases where there were bullet wounds through the abdomen, and two or more with two bullets into and through the abdomen. All of these got well—treatment: tr. iodine to the wounds of entry and exit. One case at the International Hospital had had a bullet through the occipital region about one and a half inches behind the ear; recovery was complete as far as wounds were concerned, but mentally he certainly was not normal; his previous history was unknown.

The time I spent in famine relief work was rich in experience. Whenever we foreigners worked in the famine districts we went in pairs. The need for relief was so urgent that we could not wait until the districts were quiet, so we went without military protection. The whole country was in a state of absolute anarchy. Wholesale, widespread looting, murder, and rapine still continued. Cities and towns were attacked and robbed by the soldiers—robbers whenever or wherever their evil desires dictated. Although the only instance where a foreigner was in imminent danger, as far as we knew, was when his convoy of grain boats was attacked by robbers and one coolie killed, none of us knew for certain when our time might come; so it was a bit nerve racking, especially when the native helpers would themselves get frightened and come to us for courage and comfort.

When morning after morning one finds people lying round dead in a public convenience; when one sees people dying of starvation by the roadside; when one knows positively of a woman burying a still living child because "she had no food and it had to die anyway"; when one knows that dogs dig up the freshly buried

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and eat them because even they are starving to death; when one knows of people eating a dog that had died; when one sees, handles, and smells food being eaten and that food composed of a cake made of grasses, barks, roots, and weeds, with a few kernels of wheat scattered through it, from all appearance dried cow manure; when one sees every article that the house possesses, even to the roof, either burned or sold for food; when one sees the glossy, pastey, tightly drawn, dark coloured, wrinkled skin, projecting cheek bones, and the teeth covered with sordes, or, on the other hand, the swollen faces, hands, and feet, and even general anasarca, which indicate the person about to die of starvation; when one sees, examines, and treats people poisoned by the weeds and grasses they had been forced to eat for food; when one sees thousands of people begging on their knees for a chance to work for food and that food either bean cake, i.e., the remains of beans after the oil has been pressed from them, which are used in normal years principally for manure, or Kao liang, that is a seed of a species of corn used for feeding pigs or making alcohol; when the one member of a family to whom a ticket entitling him or her to work for the food payment and thus feed five or six mouths, is so weak that he or she can earn only one hundred and forty-four cash a day—seven cents gold a day—and that after the wage paid is nearly double the ordinary wage; when the people would simply crowd around for medical and surgical relief from ulcers, sores, abscesses, eczemas, skin diseases, poisoning, and famine fever resulting from a starvation diet;—it seems to me there was urgent need of the missionary physician.

Relief has been given without pauperizing and only in return for labour, except in the cases of those too old or too diseased or crippled to work, and the labour performed counted for preventing future floods because all work was done either in building ditches or repairing permanently the banks of the Grand Canal. To superintend the building of a canal bank nearly three miles long, seventy-five feet wide at its base, thirty-two feet wide at the top, and twelve feet high, was my immediate job. Here five thousand men and women worked like ants in well-ordered confusion, and, since every grain of earth was either carried in baskets or on wheelbarrows, it was a busy scene. There were many annoying happenings, for the Chinese are adepts in cheating, and one's justice had to be tempered with mercy.

I have written, possibly, too much, but perhaps I have shown, in some measure, the earnest for missionary work from a different standpoint to the customary one.

Shangai, China. W. R. M.

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