

A COLOSSAL TRAGEDY.

As recently as our July issue we published an account by Miss Gladys Stephenson, F.B.C.N., Principal of the Nursing School of the Union Hospital, Hankow, China, in which she wrote enthusiastically of the "glorious graduation ceremony" which had just taken place there. Alas, a letter just received tells of the demolition of the hospital in the recent terrible floods.

Officials of the British College of Nurses will remember Mr. James Liu, the Chinese Nurse to whom Miss Stephenson refers, as he called at the College, and was much impressed with its arrangements, shortly before he left England for China.

Miss Stephenson writes as from the Union Hospital, Hankow:—

"The world seems to have turned topsy-turvey. It is amazing how much can happen in a short time and completely change one's life and outlook. I expect you have read about the fearful floods in Hankow. Our hospital compound is one of the worst affected. It all seems like an evil dream to me, that I can hardly believe.

At the end of June, Dr. Hilda Byles with whom I lived for three years, before moving into my new house was taken ill with an attack of pleurisy. She was unusually strong and vigorous, rather Spartan in her habits so that we anticipated no danger from this attack of pleurisy. However, before long, symptoms of toxic poisoning manifested themselves and she passed away. Her death came as a great shock to us all, and it is a sore loss to the work. We now have no responsible woman doctor in our busy women's hospital.

Only two days after the funeral came this utterly unexpected flood. The river Yangtse always rises in summer but I have never seen it overflow its high banks at Hankow, though it regularly does in other places. The river is usually about 20-25 feet high, now it is up to 53 feet and over. There has never been such a flood for over eighty years.

Hankow and Wuchang, the city on the other side of the river, are protected by dykes all round and everyone of these broke this year with the enormous weight of the water. Even had the dykes been kept up, this unusual rise would have overflowed them.

However, the water began creeping into our grounds at midnight, and by dawn it was up to our doorsteps.

I couldn't walk to the hospital after breakfast, until they had made a rough raft of shutters and a milk box on which I went over. We worked at top speed moving patients, Out-Patient Department, dining room and dispensary, offices, etc. I moved my office books, etc., up to the top of cupboards and highest bookshelves, never dreaming that the water would be more than a few feet high. James Liu even pooch-pooched the idea of any at all in the lower floor, so we just left the office and then went on moving other things, we had to move hospital, kitchens and stores, Chinese staff residences and our own residences. By tea time we had to have boats to come in at the landing windows. I was the only Englishwoman there at the time, as Miss Ellison and Miss Howard had gone to Kuling the day after the funeral (they had been nursing Dr. Byles) and all the other English people had gone. There were three English men doctors on duty.

We decided to have meals on the upstairs verandah of "Redcote," my nice new house, the kitchen being drowned out, the cook took up a kerosene oilcan and he cooked for us as best he could, we had to have tinned food and he managed to cook some vegetables for the four of us and keep

us supplied with cold boiled water; the weather was very hot. The water went up and up and soon all our lower buildings were blotted out, our compound wall, high concrete gate posts, our tile lined drive, all buildings of one story such as gate house, old ladies' home, etc.

Gazing out from upstairs, we could see only water and sundry roofs in any and every direction. About a quarter of a mile from us runs the railway embankment, which became crowded with refugees whose homes on the lower ground around were swept away. Every day we sent a boat with medicines, doctors and nurses. Evangelist and literature for them (the municipality supplied them with food) until alas, after about ten days, the flood rose over that embankment, and it was blotted out.

The suffering of the whole city is unspeakable. The water stayed at the level of the ceiling of our first floors for several days and we kept the second and third story of the hospital running. Each day I rowed by boat from my landing window over to the hospital, making a wide detour round a sea of wreckage. We hoped and hoped that each day would see a drop of the flood, but after a fortnight the water rose again and came into the second floor of our hospitals up as far as the keyholes of the doors. Our two surgical wards, suite of operating rooms, store-rooms, etc., all had to be hastily evacuated and in my house, the water gradually crept up and up to my bed. We couldn't abandon the place with patients and nurses still there, so we sloshed through the water day by day, with fish and water snakes in numbers in our corridors. I slept nightly above the water. The last morning, however, it was almost as high as my mattress and the cook said he couldn't raise his oil can stove any higher out of the water, so we had to move to the hospital. Then a gale began to blow and it blew our lake into a choppy sea with waves four feet high which dashed and dashed against our buildings, and at dusk a portion of the women nurses' dormitory began to collapse. It was a two storey building and the furniture fell against the staircase wall bang, bang, with every wave. One of the doctors rowed round, his boat going up and down like a cockleshell on the waves, and managed to tow some of the heaviest things away for fear they would smash the wall of the main building. The women patients and nurses were all so frightened that I stayed up the night with them and it was a ghastly night. Gradually they all dropped to sleep, save the head Chinese nurse and we went back and forth all night through the wards. Every half hour or so came a crash and clatter of falling tiles and bricks both at the women's and men's end of the hospital. Boom, boom, all night dashed the waves. I never knew how long it might be before the building in which we stood might collapse. About 4 a.m. a fearful mighty thud made my heart jump, and with my lantern (electric light had all gone long ago) I moved cautiously round to see what part of the building had gone. I found that part of the new wing (only opened in April) had gone. Not the wards, but offices and storerooms that had been built on to the corridor.

Well, in the morning, we had to evacuate the women and children and all the girl nurses. Some went home, some went to a hospital in another city. The men moved up to the third floor, where we have our laboratory in which two of the doctors slept, while nurses and servants were all along the corridor and the ward was filled with men patients who begged us to keep them because their homes were flooded out and they had nowhere to go, also some were in splints and couldn't move. Mr. James Liu was able to cope with them and now that the women had all gone there was nothing for me to do and not an inch of space for me to sleep and live, so I left and came up to the hills. Dr. Cundall and Dr. Chapman took me by boat right out to the steamer (a twenty minutes' ride

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