

THE CYCLONE AT NELLORE

BY MISS HELEN BENJAMIN

WE have been told that you would like to hear something about the cyclone which struck Nellore on the 1st of November. As time passes, the experiences of that day and those immediately following become more and more like a dream, a nightmare, perhaps. But when we pinch ourselves to see whether or not we are awake, we see too many evidences around us to believe it was just a bad dream.

The monsoon broke about 9 A.M. with a strong wind. The wind grew stronger and stronger until by 1 P.M. branches of trees began to fall. We then looked at the storm with interest but with no forebodings of evil. But by 4 P.M. things began to happen. The tiles began to fly off one of the wards. As soon as the patients were moved from that ward the tiles began to come off the private rooms, and the patients in them had to be moved across an open space with branches flying here and there. The doors and shutters were continually being blown open and the rain driven across the wards. So the next hour or so was spent in moving patients from a wet place to one not quite so wet until we realized that there were no more such places. All we could do was give the patients all the blankets there were and let them huddle together for warmth.

We hoped that the storm would abate with sundown, but it only took on fresh vigor. We were soon unable to go from one ward to another, and for nearly two hours we had to stay wherever we happened to be, listening to the cyclone as it blew off roofs, blew furniture here and there, and tore down walls. We wondered how long it would be before the entire building would fall, and whether those in other parts were still alive.

Most of the nurses were in the hospital building, and they did well in helping care for the patients, but when there was nothing to do but wait, it was hard for them to keep up their courage. The patients seemed stunned. When they found out that there were no more blankets, they didn't say a word nor make a cry. Perhaps it was from their long training of accepting things as they are.

About 8 P.M. the wind abated, and we all went around to see how things were. The doors of one ward were jammed to prevent entering. An unconscious woman and a small boy were inside, both covered with broken tiles but unhurt. In the next room a little girl was covered with tiles and glass, but also unharmed. While we were rejoicing that the storm had abated and that no one was hurt, another cyclone came from another direction, and that one was worse than the first. The tiles then began to fly off one ward full of patients. We did not know what would happen, then. But again no one was hurt. We were indeed relieved when about midnight the storm quieted down and we were able to make the patients a little more comfortable. Dr. B. Benjamin with difficulty managed to get to the bungalow. The servants were there in the one room which was not flooded. They said the roof was off the bungalow. In the afternoon they had helped without a word in moving

the patients and then did all they could to protect the bungalow. It was impossible for them to get to their homes until 2 o'clock in the morning, and you can imagine how worried they were about their families. We left the patients in the care of the night nurses for a few hours while we went to the bungalow for dry clothes and a little rest. Dr. Benjamin and Miss Magilton looked rather odd in the clothes they had to wear, but they felt good at any rate. As we returned to see how everyone was and to take some of the nurses with us to the bungalow where they could be a little more comfortable, the clouds cleared away and we could see the sky so calm and beautiful. At first it seemed as though it were mocking the earth as it looked down upon the wreckage, but as we looked at it some more we realized that it was giving us a message of hope. Buildings and much of nature were destroyed, but people were still here whom we could serve.

The sun shone brightly the morning following the cyclone and for two days after that. It seemed the night before that the hospital would have to be closed, but things looked brighter in the morning, and we took on fresh courage when we realised that we could keep the hospital open. All of us doctors, nurses, Bible-women, servants, started in to get things back to normal, and we are still at it. We started with one ward roof intact and now have roofs on all the buildings of the hospital, except one. People flocked to us for shelter, so the old and new dispensary buildings were used for several weeks for that purpose. Nearly all the hospital supplies were wet. If you had passed by the compound while the sun was shining the first two and even three weeks, you would have seen everything from sheets to soap powder spread out to dry. Everybody took turns being coolies, dhobies, and maistries, in addition to being doctors and compounders and nurses. Dr. Benjamin became an expert at bailing out water whenever it rained and no one could spread out wet clothes as quickly as Miss Magilton; Dr. English's hobby was drying books.

Thanks to the sunshine, much sickness was prevented. Cholera broke out in Nellore but was soon checked. It was much worse in the villages. We enjoyed the opportunity of being able to help in the villages by caring for those who were sick and by giving cholera injections. As we returned from those trips of the villages we realized that we were so much better off than the people there. Living in the downstairs of the bungalow with the roof off and having to bail the water out of the hall every time it rained to prevent the rooms from being flooded seemed quite a luxury. Dr. Benjamin and Miss Magilton have decided that it is best to possess only the bare necessities of life in order to save the heart pangs which come upon pulling beloved treasures out from under pile of tiles or picking up dresses out of the mud in the garden. That policy would save a great deal of work also. Pictures, books, sewing materials, and papers are rather difficult to rejuvenate, and stamps and envelopes drive one to distraction.

When we have been to other parts of the country for a few days and returned to Nellore, the place looks rather desolate, but when we stay here for awhile and see the trees begin to leaf and people begin to rebuild their homes, we are happy in looking forward to the time when Nellore will be better than before. The hospital buildings were damaged but the spirit of the people was not harmed. We are happy in continuing our work of helping people grow stronger in body and soul that they may be strong in their service for their fellow men and thus please God.

HELEN BENJAMIN.