

A DEBT OWED THE CHINESE

Their Aid to Allies in War Helped to Bring on Present Famine.

By UNION N. BETHELL,

Chairman of the Executive Committee of
the American Committee for China

Famine Fund.

PRECISELY because the famine calamity in the great Chinese Republic has been considered primarily in the light of a humanitarian and philanthropic obligation, there is some danger of overlooking the foundation of justice on which rests the appeal in behalf of these millions of temporarily helpless people. The fact is that if ever a cause was essentially one of justice that cause is China's.

For hundreds of years the vast area which is now afflicted has been known as the "Granary of China." It corresponds closely, as a source of food supply, to our Middle West. In distinction from many other parts of the republic, it is a wheat-raising country. Its surplus has fed millions of people annually. In the last years of the war this big wheat supply was needed overseas. Approached upon the matter of a wheat shipment, China immediately responded. She held nothing back, but shipped thousands of tons of wheat. The part this wheat played in the winning of the war and the saving of life among the civil population of Europe can never be overestimated.

The last of this wheat had scarcely left the shores of China before the standing crops were destroyed by a great flood. The farmers plowed and planted again, but the flood was followed by drought. One section and then another was seared by lack of rainfall. A visitation of locusts added to the disaster. Three successive crops failed, and the unhappy population, which for two years had been fighting a losing battle with hunger, now faced stark starvation.

China had not escaped the penalty of war conditions any more than had other nations. Her trade and exchange had suffered. She was undergoing many troubles due to her remarkable feat of transforming an ancient empire into a republic. There was far from complete agreement between the North and South upon Government policy and personnel. To guard against serious conditions, military movements occupied the attention and resources of officials. Thus the famine got under way before the extent of the impending calamity could be appreciated.

But China's depletion of her own stores to aid the allies did not stop with the supplying of food. When the United War Work Campaign was under way in the United States to raise funds for the various American organizations, it was decided to give Japan and China an opportunity to contribute. China's "quota" was fixed at \$100,000. When her contribution came in, it totaled more than \$1,500,000. In the allotment of this \$100,000 subscription in China the part set for the city of Tientsin was \$10,000. Americans there called a meeting at which it was protested that, with war conditions affecting business and a multitude of other calls upon their resources, it was going to be all but impossible to raise \$10,000. While these Americans were discussing the problem a Chinese merchant walked into the room. He said:

"Gentlemen, the Chinese business men of the city have just held a meeting, and we have decided to subscribe \$100,000 to this fund. The provincial parliament has also met and subscribed another \$100,000. This makes \$200,000, and you Americans are urged to give whatever you think you are able to."

This example set by the Chinese so inspired the others that the total contribution in that city rose to \$290,000, and Tientsin magnificently "went over the top" 2,900 per cent.

Nothing need be said of the 360,000 workmen whom China sent to France during the war to repair roads and dig trenches, or of the Chinese graveyards that dot Northern France where there men fell in the performance of their duty. But if the question be held to the matter of foodstuffs alone, China's act in depriving herself should be considered on its merits.

It should be remembered that China made no appeal whatever for help. Her predicament was revealed to the world by foreign friends within her borders. This reluctance to expose the plight of millions of China's citizens was typical of the admirable spirit of independence and self-respect of the Chinese people, as are also the efforts at self-help which have been made by the Chinese Government and individuals. In all, China has contributed more than \$17,000,000 (Mex.) to the relief of her starving. President Hsu Shih-chang set the example of individual giving with a contribution of \$100,000. A single family in Shanghai has contributed \$500,000, and merchants in all parts of the republic have given generously. A considerable sum of money has been raised through a national relief drive, among the features of which have been successful tag days in many of the great cities. The Government raised a loan of \$4,000,000 to be applied solely to famine relief, and imposed surtaxes which bring in something like \$750,000 monthly. Civil employes have been taxed 20 per cent. of their salaries, and Cabinet officers have voluntarily pledged a month's income to famine relief. President Hsu was abundantly justified in the simple statement he made in a recent cable of thanks to the American people for the aid it has given.

"The Central Government," he said, "is doing its best to meet the situation in spite of the present financial stringency."

Despite the best efforts of China herself, however, the calamity has grown to proportions which not even Chinese officials foresaw. It has become too overwhelming, as Minister Sze has stated, "for any one nation to handle." The Chinese people have been compelled to admit freely their desperate plight, and in making the admission have expressed their gratitude on every possible occasion for the generous help they have received.

These very expressions of gratitude have seemed to mislead some to whom they have been addressed. They have created in many minds the impression that this expression of gratitude was in recognition of ordinary charity. The fact is that China's cause is not alone one of philanthropy and common humanitarianism, but also one of simple justice.