

Literature, &c.

From the Knickerbocker Magazine.
THE PLAGUE AT CONSTANTINOPLE.
BY AN EYE-WITNESS.

IN 1837 I was resident in Galata, one of the faubourgs of Constantinople, sufficiently near the scenes of death caused by the ravages of the plague to be thoroughly acquainted with them, and yet to be separated from the Turkish part of the population of that immense city. It is not material to the present sketch to dwell upon the subject of my previous life, or the causes which had induced me to visit the capital of the East at such a period of mortality; and I will therefore only add, that circumstances of a peculiarly painful nature obliged me to locate myself in Galata, where there were none to sympathize in my feelings, or any one with whom I could even exchange more than a word of conversation. I saw none but the widowed owner of the house in which I had a chamber, her daughter Aleuka, and Petraki, her little son.

While the epidemic raged, we four endeavoured to keep up a rigid quarantine. Each recommended to the other the strictest observance of our mutual agreement not to receive any thing from without doors, except the necessities of life; and whenever we left the house, which was but as seldom as possible, not to come in contact with any one. Whenever I went out I invariably wore an oil cloth cloak, and by the aid of my cane prevented the dogs of the streets, which are there so numerous, from rubbing against me. If I visited any one, which I seldom did, I always sat on a bench or chair to prevent conveying or receiving contagion; and before even entering the house, I always underwent the preparation of being smoked in a box, which during the prevalence of the plague is placed near its entrance for that purpose. These boxes were some eight feet high by three square, the platform on which the feet rested elevated about a foot above the earth, so as to admit under it a dish containing the ingredients of the prophylactic, and a hole in the door to let the face out during the smoking of the clothes and body. We procured our daily supply of provisions from a *Bak-kal*, a retail grocer, whose shop was directly under our front window; an itinerant *Ekmekci*, or bread man, brought our bread to the door; our vegetables were procured from a gardener close by, and our water we drew from a cistern under the house; in fine, our food was either smoked or saturated before we touched it, and every possible precaution observed to cut our little family off from the dreadful scourge, "the pestilence which walketh in darkness and the destruction which wasteth at noon day." The mother and daughter throughout the day spun silk, knitted wollen suits, or embroidered kerchiefs for head dresses, called in *Romaic fakies*, an even to a late hour of the night they frequently continued the same employment, until the plague prevented the sale of their handiwork, and their materials were all used up. All day long they would sit upon a sofa of their little apartment, facing the street, and while their hands toiled for a subsistence, the widow's daughter hummed a plaintive air, or occasionally broke the silence by conversing with her mother. The son was yet too young to be of assistance to his desolate mother and sister, and except when he said his letters to them, spent the day in idleness. As to my own employment, the dull period of time passed with them was a blank in my existence; and yet, such is the influence of past penury and pain, that I now recall them with pleasure.

The weather was generally very warm, and south west breezes over the sea of Marmora prevailed. From our highest windows we could observe sluggish seamen lounging on the decks of their vessels in the port, afraid to land amid the pestilence. Here and there a vessel strove against the current of the Bosphorus to gain an anchorage; or would slowly float down that stream into the open sea, on its way to healthier and happier Europe. The starving dogs at nightfall would howl dismally, bewailing the loss of the benevolent hands from which they usually received their food; the gulls and cormorants floated languidly over our dwelling, wetpowered by the heat; and the dead silence, which in the afternoon and evenings prevailed, made a most melancholy and affecting impression on my mind.

The plague that summer, (I may limit the period to three months,) carried off more than fifty thousand persons. For some time the mortality amounted to a thousand *per diem*. The number of corpses which passed the limited range of my window daily increased; and after witnessing the spectacle for some time, I always insensibly avoided the sight of the dead, and felt a cold shudder run over my frame whenever the voice of the priest accompanying the corpses struck my ear. So dreadful is the malady, so surely contagious, and so mortal, that so soon as attacked, the unfortunate being is deserted by relatives and friends, and when dead, two or four porters beside a priest were generally the only persons who attended the body to the grave. When the deceased is a Mussulman, he is more frequently attended during his illness, and after death to his tomb, than if a Christian. With the former, the plague is a visitation of Providence, from which it is both useless and a sin to escape, while with the latter not only is it deemed necessary to provide for one's own life, but to do so at the sacrifice of the dearest friend. Often I noticed a dead body tied on a plank which a single porter carried on his back; at other times the object would be concealed within a bag, and then the grave was a ditch common to all, into which the porter would

shake off his load and return for another. No priest or Imam there presided over the funeral scene; few or none were the prayers that were said over the remains: he who but a short week before had been proud of his strength or condition, or she who in the same short time previous excelled in beauty and grace, there lay confounded in one neglected, unhonoured, and putrid mass. The air became impregnated with the effluvia; the houses around the Turkish cemeteries, which are mostly in the heart of the city, where the dead are interred, but some three feet beneath the surface, were soon deserted, their owners dead. The ever-green cypress trees under whose umbrageous quiet the beautiful children once played, now moaned over their little graves; and in fine, every one in the deserted city walked with measured steps, apprehensive of threatening death: awe and consternation filled the minds of all.

The Sultan's own household was not free from the scourge. By some means it found access to his servants and carried off about fifty of them. Their bodies were cast into the Bosphorus, and the Sultan fled to another palace. The ministers of the Sublime Porte suffered severely in their families; their wives and slaves died off in numbers; and even the minister of foreign affairs is said to have taken it and narrowly escaped. Few survived when once attacked, and the chances of recovery were scarcely worth calculating. And yet among the Mussulmans little or no precaution was taken; for although by a government order all the principal offices were provided with fumigatory boxes, they were seldom used. The Mussulman Sheikh declared that the contagion came from Heaven, and could only be averted by Almighty power. Yet it was a well known fact that cleanliness of habits went far toward preserving against the disease; and frequent change of apparel, with ordinary precautions, sufficed to preserve many who otherwise would doubtless have taken it.

But I think the reader will be able, from the preceding sketch, to form some idea of the nature and extent of the mortality of the plague in 1837. While it raged, every feeling approaching to a similarity with what is known to denote an attack, excites apprehension. A pimple, through the medium of the imagination, is transformed into a horrid *bubo*; a cold or a simple head-ache, however trifling, are attributed to the dreadful malady; and even the firmest mind at such time quails under trifling appearances. In some cases the scene of agony closes in a few hours—even minutes; they fall down and almost immediately expire. Others linger for twenty-four or forty-eight hours, or several days elapse before death puts an end to their sufferings. Some again bear it in their systems for several days, and attend to their usual occupations: at length it appears they fall ill and expire, or recover. Few account for their being attacked; they do not remember having touched any one suspected or exposed; and again, the porters, whose duty it is to convey the attacked to the hospitals and the corpses to their graves, escape. The mother attends upon her dying child, sacrifices every apprehension to her affection, and yet escapes, or the child brings it to its parent, who dies, while the innocent cause survives. No cure has yet been found for it; and Nature must be left to take her course. Extreme heat or cold have a favourable effect upon it; but the temperate climate of Constantinople, with the frequent dearth of water, the dust, and other impurities, tend greatly to its dissemination.

It was therefore during this painful period that I resided in Galata; free, as I had hoped, from the contagion; and yet it found its way into our little family, accompanied by all its horrors.

One morning in the latter part of the month of October, invited by the clearness of the air and a fresh breeze which had scarcely strength sufficient to ruffle the water of the harbour, I left my humble apartment and ascended the steep hill of Pera. The view—from the small tuft of graves near the Galata tower, some of which were fresh; of the surrounding villages and the great city itself, where, although devastation had been and still was being carried on with horror, there seemed to reign the most perfect tranquility, resembling the calm bosom of the treacherous sea, quiet over the lifeless bodies of its victims and the noble vessels which had furrowed its surface—relieved the monotony of my existence. I gazed longingly upon the many ships lying before me at anchor in the stream, which could in a few days bear me far away from the scenes of death and desolation that surrounded me; or I exchanged a word with any passing acquaintance who ventured from Pera to his counting house in Galata. A longer walk gave rise to too many sad reflections. Farther on was the *Petit Champ des Morts*, a small Turkish cemetery, here and there spotted with new made graves, over which more than one aged female mourned the loss of her life's companion, or perhaps it would be one of fewer years, who wept the fatal destiny of her young husband, brother, sister, or child.

After spending the best part of the day in walking about, I returned to the house of my residence. As usual, I found the door fastened. I knocked, but no one answered me. Again I knocked, and called repeatedly before my voice was heard. At length a low moan, and then a scream, issued from within. Petraki, the widow's son, opened the door, and with a pale and frightened countenance told me his mother had suddenly been taken very ill. There was no alternative. I entered her sitting room, where in the company of the family I had spent many quiet hours. Now how changed! The mother lay upon the sofa, pale and breathing with difficulty. Aleuka, the daughter, knelt by her side on the floor, though

greatly agitated herself, and endeavouring to calm her mother's apprehensions. Without once reflecting on the possible consequences, I sat down on a chair beside the sufferer, felt her pulse, and, as well as I could, made inquiries after her health. Her pulse was quick, her tongue white and thickly furled, and extreme lassitude was shown by her dejected countenance. Uncertain as to the nature of her disease, and unable to offer any alleviation of her sufferings, I retired to my apartment. There I did reflect on the danger which I incurred, and the possibility of the widow having caught the plague.

Every hour she became worse; her sufferings were intensely painful; and to shorten the recital of the sad scene of that night, I will only add, that the horrid disease showed itself on her person before midnight, and at break of day her spirit fled. Of course my mind now prepared for death. I felt confident that I also should soon be a victim to the plague. Early in the morning I called a passing priest and had the widow's remains conveyed to their last abode—I knew not where. I had no place to fly to; every door would be closed against me; and I retired to my apartment, feeling that I was stepping into my tomb while yet alive. There I was not long kept in suspense, for soon the plague attacked first Petraki then myself. When giddiness, the first symptom of the plague, seized me, and I could no longer stand, but fell despairingly on my bed, what were my feelings! But let me not recall them now; the mental agony which I suffered it is impossible to describe, and I shudder at the recollection. Aleuka attended upon me and her brother with all the tenderness and care and forgetfulness of self which is so characteristic of the female character. I begged her to leave me alone, to place water by my side and depart, but she would not hear of it.

The first night after his attack Petraki expired, and on the following morning was borne away; and I have an indistinct recollection of being visited on the evening of the same day by the priest and porters. They endeavoured to prevail upon Aleuka to desert me, saying that in a few hours I would cease to exist. But she constantly refused, determined, she replied, to remain by my side until my sufferings were ended.

For several days I was delirious. I remember I knew of nothing; nothing but water passed my lips. Sores broke out over my body, and those on my groins and arm-pits were not closed for some months. My neck, however, was free, and this no doubt saved my life. On the seventh day I regained my senses, and found myself in my apartment, the wasted figure of my guardian angel still watching over me. I remember, on perceiving in me a favourable change, how her countenance lit up with joy! Oh, Friendship! how seldom are you found with the sincerity which I then beheld in an humble and uneducated girl! Just when I thought all my prospects in life were brightened; when I had scarcely felt the unkindness of mankind, and despaired of ever again finding anything in this world worth living for; when I had already bidden it farewell, and the other world was full in view, I found what alone can make life delightful even in poverty and misfortune—friendship and love. Soon the violence of the disease abated, and I was saved.

I must hastily pass over my long and painful convalescence. A month elapsed before I could venture to go beyond doors. Aleuka attended upon me, and through her economy my purse yet held out. The plague had greatly subsided; the month of December set in with uncommon severity of cold, and checked its progress. Oh! the exquisite delight with which I left my hard and burning bed and close apartment, the scenes of all my sufferings, for the first time! With a prayer of thankfulness on my lips, I crossed the threshold of the humble dwelling, and once more slowly mounted the steep hill of Pera.

It was a bright, sunny, clear morning; the fresh, cool breeze from the Black Sea blew over me, infusing new strength and life into my shattered frame. The streets were again re-peopled, and business renewed. No one recognized me in my pale, haggard, and swollen countenance; and when I presented myself at the door of a countryman in Pera, he drew back with an exclamation of surprise, as if he had beheld a spirit.

My short story is told. I have comprised in a few words the tale of many long days of agony and suffering, both mental and corporeal. I first regained my strength and vigour; the hollow furrows of my forehead and cheeks soon gave way to the effects of a generous diet; and I once more stood forth in health and full powers.

But you will ask, "And where is she who watched over you during your moments of suffering?—whom you called your guardian angel, and of whose friendship and love you spoke in such feeling terms?" I reply, that she sits even now at my side; her handsome and intelligent countenance reading in my face the varied emotions to which the tracing of these lines give rise. Devoted Aleuka is my loving and much loved wife.

From the New York Tribune.

EDUCATION.

Mental and Moral Culture, and Popular Education. By S. S. Randall, General Deputy Superintendent of Common Schools of the State of New York.

This is a most valuable book—full of true and beautiful thoughts, profound experience, wise suggestions. It is the higher and abstruser doctrines of the Spirit of the Age—

sometimes speaks in words vague and misty to the common mind its sublime but deep hidden truths—the progress of universal Progress and Perfectibility, or Hope, Love, and Happiness, upon which all modern effort of Philanthropy is founded, made practical and its mighty ideas reduced to plain and every day language. It is what the Prism was to the mystery of the Rainbow—what the Compass and the Quadrant were to the poetical dream of the mariner in olden times, who sailed the ocean led only by a thin thread of silver starlight: it is the plain and perspicuous aspirations and prophecies that lie swelling at the bottom of the heart of the Nineteenth Century. This book, without pretension of style, without involution of construction or that absent-mindedness of genius which so often leads our master spirits to forget that their readers see not through their eyes, and understand not with their own god-like apprehension, develops clearly and simply the truest and best doctrines of the age upon the all-important, all-absorbing theme of Education. Would that no Teacher, Father, Child, should be without a deep and thorough knowledge of the truths contained in this little book? They would thus be all wiser and better fitted to play well their parts in the great Drama of Life and Civilization, which now in the present times approaches its culmination and catastrophe.... We had begun marking sentences for extract, as we read; but sentences soon became pages and pages grew to chapters. We must therefore forego most of what we had proposed, and make up some random and unsatisfactory selections—which, however, we hope, will have the effect of inducing others to read the work itself.

"The truth is," says Mr Randall in his introduction, "the truth is, the great principles which lie at the foundation of the mental improvement of our species have not been brought home to the masses of the community, with a force at all proportional to their clear comprehension. The most ignorant are, in general, the most selfish; and even in those rare cases where no higher motives can be appealed to than those of individual and personal interest serious inquiry, followed by energetic action in the direction leading to the portals of knowledge and wisdom, will be almost sure to ensue from a skillful application of the selfish principle to the objects, means and ends of existence. Convince the man who aspires to nothing higher than mere worldly wealth, and who apparently lives for no other or greater object than the gratification of his animal nature, that the enjoyment of uninterrupted health depends upon the observance of certain conditions, the greater part of which are subject to his own control, and he becomes at once a student of physiology, and will, in due time, to all human probability, ascend in the scale of intellect and civilization, until he becomes an enlightened and useful member of society. Convince him, also, that the uniform practice of virtue and morality, in all the varied relations of life, is not only compatible with the acquisition and enjoyment of wealth, and the rational gratification of the physical appetites and wants, but absolutely indispensable to their continued and secure enjoyment, and he becomes at once a moral and benevolent man. In like manner, convince the most careless and indifferent individual that the present and future happiness of his children is placed in a great degree at his own disposal; that, at every stage of their progress toward the maturity of manhood, it is in his power to give such a direction to their ductile minds as will, in all probability, insure their welfare in all coming time, while it promotes their present enjoyment; and that, for any neglect in the judicious exercise of the immense power thus conferred, the penalty will be visited upon him in the shape of mental and bodily sufferings endured by his offspring as the direct and inevitable consequence of such neglect;—let him be well and thoroughly convinced of all this, and he becomes a most efficient and intelligent promoter of every institution for the good of popular education."

Entering upon his subject, we have the following tribute to the Age and the Spirit which controls and guides its action and progress:

"The present may be regarded as emphatically the age of improvement—of progress—of advancement in physical, intellectual, and especially in moral science. The human mind, diverted for a season from the destructive and degrading physical contests waged by ambition, pride and passion for supremacy and power, has passed by a rapid transition through the wide circle of the Arts and Sciences to a systematic and enlightened examination of its own intrinsic nature, capacities, wants and destination. From its comprehensive survey of the external universe, its analysis of the properties of matter, its combination of the innumerable substances of the material world, and its subjection of the physical powers of nature to the various purposes of an advancing civilization—it has ascended to the great source of all knowledge and all power, and traced its own derivation from the spirit of the universe—its innate capabilities—its progressive expansion—its boundless aspirations, and its immortality. From a survey of its own history, in all the diversified forms of its development from the dawn of ancient civilization through the thick mists of ignorance, superstition and error to the present advanced condition of society, it is beginning to deduce those great elementary truths which lie at the foundation of a wise and enlightened philosophy—truths originally implanted by the Creator on its uncorrupted tablets; truths asserted and reasserted in every age of its experience by the few who were capable of discerning, through the surrounding