

GENERAL READING

THE PLAGUE.

The plague which is causing such a sensation in Eastern Europe at present was first heard from Astrachan on the 8th inst., when it was reported that of 195 cases on the first two days of the year 1483 had proved fatal, a rate of mortality sufficient to exclude the idea that the disease was typhus. It had shown itself previously, and the occasion of the sudden extension was a thaw. Its first appearance was in the Cossack village of Velyanka soon after the return of two Cossack regiments from the war in Asia Minor. Typhus had prevailed among the men, but their clothing and effects had been fumigated—probably imperfectly—and to this the disease was traced, being announced as typhus. Sickness began to prevail towards the close of November; in the second week of December the daily mortality in a village of 600 souls was 3 per cent.; then a panic seized the people, who would neither succor the sick nor bury the dead, and they fled carrying the infection and terror with them. Even when it became clear that the disease was not the typhus, but the plague, the Russian authorities were remiss in checking it and preparing for it. This remissness is the more inexcusable, apart from the question of international obligations, because of the peculiarly disadvantageous circumstances under which Russia finds herself,—with a population never notable for its observance of sanitary laws, and at present enfeebled by hardships consequent upon war and partial famine, and with an extremely limited body of medical men, which the war has greatly depleted. The disease has spread along the course of the Volga towards the north and west, till now it threatens Moscow and Europe generally. Expert physicians declare it to be the plague, and the symptoms which are described—"headache, accompanied by fever and swelling of the glands"—are those of the plague. The true plague according to McCready, "is a contagious fever characterized by an eruption of carbuncles and buboes," and it is added that in cases in which these glandular swellings appear are "attended with a higher grade of fever, and with profound depression of the vital forces; headache, restlessness, and vertigo are commonly present," &c., &c. Morbid anatomy hitherto has added nothing to the knowledge of the disease, of which a majority of the patients die in severe epidemics, convalescence being tedious in the event of recovery. Of the treatment all that can be said is that local applications have to be made to the eruptions; the patient's strength should be supported and the hygienic conditions possible be established—the rest is with nature.

The last appearance of the plague in Europe was in 1844, and thereafter till 1858 it was not recognized as existing. Since the latter year it has been occurring at intervals in the form of scattered local epidemics in various parts of Persia and Arabia. Three years ago Mr. Netten Radcliffe called the special attention of the English Society of Medical Officers of Health to the threatening nature of these epidemics and the high probability that the disease, if it should assume an active character of diffusiveness, would penetrate not only into Europe, but also to Great Britain, the seats of the disease being in close and constant communication with Russia by land and the Mediterranean ports by sea. There seems little reason to doubt that the plague has gradually assumed an increasing degree of virulence and of infectivity, and that the outbreaks in Astrachan and the adjoining provinces are links in a chain of continued progress towards the west. Less than two years ago the plague visited Resht, a Persian town at the south-west angle of the Caspian, which in 1882 was smitten by the pestilence, 20,000 out of its 40,000 inhabitants falling victims in a few weeks, and the city being reduced during the panic to the condition of a "charnel house, a city of the dead; no living creature was to be seen in it, and those who had been abandoned by their friends died from sheer want." Resht was invaded in 1877 from two Persian villages at the south-east angle of the Caspian; the plague has now stepped from the south-west up to Astrachan, at the north-east corner.

The opinion of a recent English writer was, that it was by no means unlikely that the contagion would overstep the barriers erected by the Russian authorities. It is too subtle, and the possibilities of evading quarantine are too numerous to allow much to be hoped for from official precautions, or even the cordons of troops drawn around the infected districts to stop fugitives have every prospect of becoming fresh centres from which the disease may be distributed. An absolute and complete quarantine, which would certainly arrest the plague, is hardly to be established, especially in these times of the increased complexity of human intercourse. Still, though the disease is as formidable as it was two centuries ago,

when it last visited England, it is confidently asserted that the provisions of the British sanitary laws and the powers of the local authorities to deal with epidemics would be found sufficient to confine and localize any cases that might occur and render them merely pathological curiosities. London, at the time of the great Plague, was inconceivably filthy, and there was no organization for the isolation of sufferers from infectious maladies and for the prompt suppression of epidemics.

The plagues recorded in history are almost numberless, and in many instances their ravages, though truthfully set down, seem incredible. Before the great plague of 542 many disastrous epidemics had been noticed. The first general plague which visited all parts of the then known world broke out in 767 B. C. In 534 B. C. Carthage was so sorely smitten that women sacrificed their children to appease the angry deities; in 461 there died at Rome and its environs 100,000 people. Theophrastus has graphically depicted the plague which visited Athens B. C. 403, laying waste also Egypt and Ethiopia. Pliny records a pestilence in the Archipelago, Egypt and Syria in 188 B. C. which swept off 2,000 persons a day during its continuance. Rome thereafter was repeatedly scourged. A. D. 80, 10,000 persons are said to have died daily during the pestilence; and another plague swept through the Empire in 167-9; still another in 189, while between 250 and 265 many towns were depopulated and many provinces ravaged, the daily mortality at the capital being 5000. The great plague of 542-5 began in Egypt and Asia Minor, swept over Syria, Persia and India, laid waste the north of Africa and in Europe devastated Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire Italy and France. It began at Alexandria, whose inhabitants, according to Paulus Diaconus, "brought this terrible judgment upon themselves and their innocent neighbors" by their reckless gluttony, bringing on "yearly fevers and dangerous indigestions." In 542 Alexandria is said to have lost 500,000 of her people by this scourge, and for miles around the city the fields were covered with unburied corpses. For three months from 5,000 to 10,000 deaths occurred daily at Constantinople; whole provinces were abandoned and cities died out, to remain vacant for many years. From 75,000,000 to 120,000,000 of victims are said to have perished in the three continents. But though Egypt, Syria and Persia were scourged, Arabia and the Caucasus escaped; and while Northern Italy suffered severely, but few seaports in Albania, Morocco and Sicily were affected. Just two centuries later Byzantium and the neighboring coasts were sorely visited, but the next great general pestilence was that at the middle of the fourteenth century. According to the Chinese, the pestilence broke out there about 1333, following great earthquakes and floods with their usual attendants, failure of crops and famine. Eve it reached Europe, this pestilence is said to have destroyed 13,000,000 people in China, and nearly twice as many in Eastern Asia and Northern Africa. It visited every part of Europe from Spain and Italy to Scotland and Russia. This was the terrible "Black death." Boccaccio's "Decameron" recalls its ravages in Florence in 1348. Half of the population of Italy are said to have died of it. In London there were 200 burials daily in the Charter House yard. The Jews were massacred by wholesale. The popular rage turning on them as the supposed authors of the pestilence, no accusation was too monstrous to be believed of them. They were charged with poisoning the streams and wells, and many of them even slew themselves to escape the hideous tortures prepared for them. Bands of flagellants and other fanatics went from town to town, lashing and torturing themselves to expiate the sins of the people—and spreading the infection. The terror-stricken wealthy enriched the monasteries with offerings of gold, and which they were obliged to cast over the walls and through the locked gates. People went to sea to escape the pestilence, and ships filled with the dead and the dying were cast upon distant strands, there to communicate the contagion. Men took refuge in forests and caves, only to find death there awaiting them. In the epidemic of 1373-5 four million people are said to have died in the Byzantine Empire. Russia, Germany, France, Italy and Northern Spain, but as the earlier scourge had spared the Mohammedan countries, where the inhabitants were more temperate and cleanly, as it was observed that the pestilence respected the monasteries of the stricter order and spared the frugal peasants dwelling in the open fields of Calabria and Sicily. In 1611 nearly a quarter of a million of people died of the plague at Constantinople, and in 1656 a Sardinian transport laden with troops carried the disease to the fertile regions of Naples, where in six months 400,000 of the inhabitants were swept away. A ship from the Levant brought the plague to Marseilles in 1720 when 62,000 of 75,000 residents perished in five weeks, among them the heroic Bishop Belzunce, who had received at Paris this message from the stricken city: "We

are dying; come home and die with us." and paying a courtly compliment to the *grande dame* he was visiting, the brave bishop bade her *au revoir*, and in an hour was posting southward, day and night to comfort his people—and to die. Yet though 70 per cent. of the population died, in the suburb of the Catalans, inhabited by abstemious Spaniards only 200 out of 6,000 perished. The later plagues in Europe and the Orient were those of 1760, in Syria, which was very malignant; of 1771-2, in Moscow; of 1773 in Persia, when 80,000 persons died at Bassora; of 1792, in Egypt—800,000 deaths; of 1799 in the North of Africa, when 3000 persons are said to have perished daily in Barbary; of 1804-5, in the south of Spain, and of 1815-16, at Naples.

Before 1665 the plague, according to Svedenham, visited England about once a generation. In 430 the living in Britain tradition tells us were not able to bury the dead, and several pestilences are recorded previous to that 1111, which extended to cattle and fowls. The plague drove Henry II. from Ireland in 1172, and swept away a prodigious number of the starving and shelterless Irish in 1204. London was visited again in 1348, 1362, and 1367—the year of the "Black Death,"—and Ireland was scourged in 1370 and 1383; in 1407 London lost 30,000 residents. In 1406 and 1470 a pestilence following a time of sore famine, ravaged Ireland and Dublin terribly. Next year the pest visited Oxford, and in 1478 destroyed more people than the continual wars for the fifteen years preceding. In 1499 and 1500 the plague drove Henry VII. and his Court over to Calais. Leaving out of the list the five epidemics of the strange and fearful "sweating sickness" which was mortal in three hours, between 1485 and 1551, we notice the visit of the plague to Limerick in 1552 and London in 1603-4, when 30,578 people died, and again in 1625, 35,417 persons perished. With the great plagues of 1664-5 most readers are familiar through the story of De Foe, which, as most of them doubtless also know, is not the tale of an eye-witness. In this visitation 68,596 persons died; fires were kept burning day and night to purify the air, and it was thought that the infection was never effectually destroyed till the great fire of 1666.—*N. Y. World.*

FAMILY READING.

"DON'T YOU PRAY?"

BY MRS. ANNIE A. PRESTON.

"We shall expect you and Henry up at the house to dinner to-morrow, Jarvis, and hope both of you will stay and go with us to the weekly evening meeting in our church," said Mr. Newell, a wealthy and prosperous merchant, to one of his clerks, just before leaving his counting room one night.

"Thank you, sir," replied the young man, with a beaming face, as he held the door open for his employer and a gentleman friend to pass through. "You don't tell me," said the gentleman, who was an old college chum of the merchant's, as he took his arm after reaching the sidewalk, "that the fastidious Fred Newell, the proudest and most exclusive of the old Gamma Sigma, the very high-toned society of our college in our day, at least, is in the habit of inviting the clerks in his employ to his elegant residence?"

"I hope I have improved in some particulars since those days," said the merchant, a far-away, regretful look quickly taking the place of a pleasant smile. "It is the first place I trust I have met with a change of heart, as we evangelical people say. But I have to confess with shame that it was some time after I had tested the joy of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and had inclined my ear unto His precious promises, before I got entirely over my love of caste and my disinclination to associate with so-called inferiors. I was led more fully to surrender myself to the spirit of the Gospel, and thus get a step nearer the Saviour in this way:

"We are blessed with quite a number of children in our home, and they educate me about as much as I educate them. One of these little ones, my sunny-haired Katy, was not very well a year or more ago. The doctor told me that I must encourage her to walk more in the open air, and that her mind must be taken up with different scenes in life. So all winter the little thing walked with me to my office nearly every morning, and stayed with me until lunch-time. She greatly enjoyed seeing the customers who went in and out, noting and commenting upon their peculiarities, and made a great many fast friendships among my employees, from my confidential clerk down to the gray-headed old night-watchman.

"So no time in the spring following, Frank Knox, my shipping clerk, a fine manly fellow, married my cashier, Julia Ledyard, a pretty, quiet, and ladylike young woman as one often meets, and they set up housekeeping on the west side, not far from our place of business. One day, when Katy had accompanied me down town as usual, Frank asked me if I would let her go home with him to dinner, saying that his wife, of

whom the child had been very fond, was longing to see her bright little face once more.

"I rather reluctantly gave my consent, and I watched her from my office window trip off up the street, clinging tightly to Frank's hand. She enjoyed herself so well, and was so importunate in asking to go again, that I allowed her to make the happy couple another visit the following week. She returned just as the carriage came to take us home, and this time I noticed that she was very quiet.

"Didn't you have a pleasant time at Frank's, my dear?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, lovely, papa; but I don't think it looks quite right for people to sit down to dinner and not have any one pray before they begin to eat. Don't you think it would be a good way before the clerks begin to keep house, to have them come up to our house and learn to pray? And can't I ask Frank to come up to dinner some day and hear you pray? Then Frank would know how.

"The next morning I let down the barriers of my 'exclusiveness,' as I had that night determined on my knees I would do, and questioned Frank a little about his home-life, while I improved the opportunity to speak of the necessity, as well as the propriety of fixed religious principles and the observance of Christian duty, now that he had married and had a home of his own.

"It came out in our conversation that on the occasion of Katy's first visit at his house, when they had seated themselves at dinner, she bowed her head and sat in silence a moment. Presently, as Frank began to serve the food, she said, 'Why, Mr. Knox! don't you pray?' 'No,' said the young husband, in some embarrassment. 'Why don't you?' Katy persisted. 'Because I don't know how,' he replied.

"On the second visit, while waiting in the little parlor for the summons to dinner, Katy said, 'Mr. Knox, have you learned to pray yet?' 'No, little dear,' was the answer. 'O, Mr. Knox,' she replied sorrowfully, 'it is too bad. I wish you would come up to our house to dinner and hear papa pray, and then you would know how.'

"That was the first intimation my head shipping clerk, who had been in my employ for years, ever had that I was a praying man. That little incident opened my eyes and showed me the path of duty. If my employees don't pray now it is not for the want of a word in season from me, nor for the want of my own example in my own home, when I occasionally invite them to dinner and to spend the evening, one or two, at a time, as I did in your hearing just now."—*American Messenger.*

AN IMPORTANT DECISION.

One night a young man in one of our smaller New England cities was on his way home from church. The service he had attended was one of a series of "protracted meetings," then holding in the city for preaching, prayer and praise, and religious inquiry. He had gone with others attracted by the fame of the evangelists who led the meetings, and sat among the curious, to look on and to hear, and perhaps to criticize. But while there an arrow from a "bow drawn at a venture" had struck his heart. When he left that house of worship his thoughts were the thoughts of a newly awakened man. Until then he had been one of the world's idolaters, living as though the earth held his only good. For the first time the conviction of a higher claim fastened upon his conscience. He tried in vain to ignore his burden and appear unconcerned. His companions left him one after another, going their different ways, and he walked on alone toward his more distant home. The street grew still as he went, till his own footstep hardily gave an echo. He had passed beyond the city pavements, and was trading on the soft ground. Silence made louder the voices above him and within him.

The sense of his responsibility to God impressed him like an awful command, and at length he stopped, as if afraid to go further. Should he obey or not? and it seemed to him to be "now or never." Every moment he realized more the seriousness of the question before him. He drew a mark in the sand across the sidewalk, and determined not to step beyond it till he had decided one way or the other. For an hour he stood there in painful debate, heaven and earth struggling in him for mastery. The bells of the steeple-clocks striking ten, the shriek of the engine on the coming express, the muffled roar of the horse cars in the far-away streets, reached his ears unheeded. His soul was busy. Prayer conquered the protest of his selfishness at last, and he surrendered to God. In all the city there was no happier heart than his that night, as he stepped over that little mark in the sand, and went home a Christian disciple. And when that young man told his story the next day there were others who were moved to follow his example, and wisely and sensibly made their choice for eternity.—*Congregationalist.*

COME INSIDE.

Recently, in illustrating the theme, "A man in Christ," Mr. Spurgeon told a story that is worth repeating. He said: Some Christians remind me of the little boys who go to bathe; all frightened and shivering, they enter the water just a little—up to the ankles they wade and shiver again. But the man who is really in Christ is like the practiced swimmer who plunges into the stream head first and finds water to swim in. He never shivers. It braces him. He rejoices in it. It has become his element. This is the man who understands the happiness of religion in a matter far beyond the conception of the half-and-half professor who has only religion enough to make him miserable. I sometimes illustrate this by a quaint American story. An American gentleman said to a friend, "I wish you would come down to my garden, and taste my apples." He asked him about a dozen times, but the friend did not come, and at last the fruit-grower said, "I suppose you think my apples are good for nothing, so you won't come and try them." "Well, to tell the truth," said the friend, "I have tasted them. As I went along the road I picked up one that fell over the wall, and I never tasted anything so sour in all my life; and I do not particularly wish to have any more of your fruit." "O," said the owner of the garden, "Those apples around the outside are for the special benefit of the boys. I went fifty miles to secure the sweetest sorts to plant all around the orchard, so the boys might give them up as not worth stealing; but if you will come inside, you will find that we grow a very different quality there, sweet as honey." Now you will find that on the outskirts of religion there are a number of "Thou shalt nots," and a number of "Thou shalt," and convictions, and alarms: but these are only the bitter fruits with which this wondrous Eden is guarded from thieving hypocrites. If you can pass by the exterior bitters, and give yourself right up to Christ and live for him, your peace shall be as the waves of the sea; and you shall find that the fruits of "this apple tree among the trees of the woods" are the most delicious fruit that can be enjoyed this side of our eternal home.

WHICH PAYS?

John Hartley was doing a flourishing business, putting up and selling patent medicines. With one or two receipts from a neighboring quack, he had manufactured quite a variety of compounds containing professedly a cure for an infinite number of diseases, but in reality comprising little else than some common drug combined with a large proportion of alcohol.

When the fears of friends were expressed, that too much spirituous liquor was about, all remonstrance was silenced by, "It pays well, and the most respectable people patronize our medicines."

It did pay well in dollars and cents for a few years, then people began to whisper that John Hartley was his best customer, and that drugs were not always added when he administered medicine in his own case.

After a while money passed out faster than it came in, and the young wife became alarmed when she found her husband unable to take care of his business, and consequently the family growing more destitute.

Sickness and death followed, and distracted by the loss of children and the accumulation of cares, the wife and mother laid down her life, leaving a drunken husband, a curse to a few friends who strove for the sake of the remaining children to keep the family together.

In striking contrast with the above, is the conduct of one who had been taught to regard the laws of God of more consequence than a few dollars and cents. Long and anxiously James B. sought for work, and when a situation in a store was offered he thankfully accepted it! With a determination to please, he performed even the most menial services required of him promptly and faithfully, then presented himself for further orders.

"Fill those bottles from yonder cask and get them ready for customers," was the command given. The sense of smell soon apprised him that he was putting up spirituous liquors, and turning to his employer, he asked,

"Am I expected to do this as a part of my work here?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Then, sir, I must bid you good morning," was firmly spoken, as with hat in hand James B. passed into the street, homeless and out of employment. Will a clear conscience, and the blessing promised to those who walk uprightly, pay this young man for his decision, or would it be better to take the wages of sin, which is death.—*American Messenger.*

INTERESTING BIBLE

FIRST QUARTER

B. C. 1042. LESSON: Zion: or, ruary 23.

Verse 1. Heathen the Jews to all given only to Kings. Or, "tum expression suggests roaring waves of wicked are and "Those who oppress their rage is the peoples." The nations surround malcontent elements themselves, vain David's successive foreign conquests it to the time of ended rebellion of when he became there is also a prophecy by the apostles, of the world's eminent opposition to hit Imagine a rain to imagine victory of quor heaven—is v human endeavor must come to nastruc Diocletian a struck, copies of inscribed, "The ing extinguished, passed away, while on its conquering claimed, "Twelve tian religion, one But the printing owned and employ of his infidel be been used for the 2. 3. Kings of every age the have been unfriended religion. 4. "If ed, it has not been worldly powers." A combined oppos Christ; Pilate, H conciled together. fied. Anointed, is "Messiah." "Christ" in Gree to David, or, p in its prophetic 28. 5. "Are we the Lord's anoint on our relation to friends or foes." foolish utterance like restive beasts harness. 6. "T scint is easy, the one has it lined w hate." 7. "So de sire to throw off restrictions of r The "communist desires unbridled cords. Referring which prisoners ropes or thongs w plow. 4. 5. He that sth of earth we are lif heaven, where G unmoved by all t He beholds the counts them as ut "All the wrath of the throne of God, where figuratively ing human emoti "O what are his f so terrible!"—T. "In the conscious his, and all power well afford to bide plishment of his with contempt l enemies: 2. Upon ers; 3. Upon the Gospel; 4. U position of science have heard men s God speak. The tent, that of the "Strange that me verse opinions 'o more than the w and seek the hono inst-nd of the glo God's wrath is n men, but a righte digation against men if they rem capacity for wra name!" Vez them Dr. Conant. 13. to naught every de 6. Yet, Notwith sition of the earth Dr. Conant transla have anointed my