



The Saturday Reader.

WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 6, 1866.

THE TURKISH EMPIRE.

IN a late number we attempted to describe the signs of trouble and change which threatened the early future of Europe, but our space did not permit us to allude but cursorily to the Turkish Empire. It is plain, however, that if "the sick man" be not actually, at last, in *articulo mortis*, his dissolution is close at hand. He is past the aid of diplomacy, and neither England nor France are likely to come forward to rescue him from the jaws of death, as they did before. To drop the Czarish metaphor, Turkey is doomed; and no human exertions or power can long prevent its downfall. The Turks have always been trespassers on the European soil, and their usurped lease has expired in the natural course of events. It is now more than four hundred years since the city of Constantinople was captured by Mahomet II., the last of the Palæologi shedding a parting ray of glory on his *effete* race by a heroic death. Europe, absorbed in its own dissensions and ambitions, allowed the Crescent to triumph over the Cross, and the Eastern Empire forever became a thing of the past. This was a sad political mistake; and Christendom had to pay dearly for its careless selfishness, cowardice and folly; and had not Prince John of Austria, at Lepanto in 1571, and John Sobieski, at Vienna in 1683—had these not arrested the tide of Musselman conquest, Christian civilization might not even at this day exist in countries which are amongst the most enlightened in the world. The Christians of Syria and Spain accepted the Mahomedan creed with an alacrity which no historian has yet satisfactorily explained; and serfdom and ignorance in Germany might have led to the same result. Circumstances existed in Moldavia, Wallachia and Greece, which, though conquered retained their faith, that was not to be found in the condition of the lower grades of the down-trodden Teutonic people, and Mahometanism would have relieved them from many of the heavy burdens under which they groaned. Christendom had as narrow escape on the day on which John Sobieski at the head of his Polish lancers rushed on the Turkish camp before Vienna, as it had when Charles Martel defeated the Arab conquerors of Spain at Tours. But to return to our subject. Lepanto first, and the siege of Vienna in the second place, constitute the turning points of the Mahometan conquest; and thenceforth Turkey from being the aggressor had to defend her own territory from aggression. Austria drove her out of Hungary and some of her other possessions, and Russia has been wresting Province after Province from her, from the reign of Peter the Great. Still she struggled fiercely against foes whom she could not successfully resist; but she knows that all power of resistance is now departed from her; she is palsied in every limb; and if left to her own exertions, she must fall

never to rise again, come the blow from what quarter it may.

Turkey has gradually been falling to pieces, but her greatest losses have been of a comparatively recent period. It is true, that the Danubian principalities have long been only nominally dependant upon her; but Mahomet Ali did not make himself master of Egypt until after 1811; Greece was declared free in 1832; and France conquered Algeria in 1830. Notwithstanding these and other losses of an earlier and later date—such as the cession of the Crimea to Russia in 1783, and Besarabia in 1812—the Turkish dominions are still of vast extent, and contain some of the most fertile countries on the globe. Some of them were among the wealthiest and most civilized portions of the ancient world, and would be so again under happier circumstances, and, above all, with a better system of government. Large districts that are now all but deserts were once teeming with a dense population, covered with cornfields and vineyards, or with cities of which the ruins only remain to testify to their number and grandeur. It is not at all unlikely that if person and property were rendered safe in those countries, a large portion of the emigration now directed to America, would find its way to them, and so open another and a nearer field of industry for the over-peopled parts of Europe. Many of the emigrants would be but returning to the ancient homes of their race.

What is to become of the vast regions forming the Turkish empire is a difficult question to solve. The population may be stated in round numbers at thirty millions, of which about one half is in Europe, the other half in Asia; for its territory and claims to territory beyond those limits are worth little consideration. The European population is chiefly Christian, the Asiatic chiefly Mahometan. Many schemes have been proposed on this head. Among these the most prominent are: First, and as a matter of course, to confine the Turkish dominions to Asia; secondly, to create a new Christian kingdom in European Turkey, of which Greece should be the head; thirdly, that Russia should be allowed to annex the Provinces to the north of the Danube, and Austria those to the south. We think, on the whole, that the last proposition is that most likely to be finally adopted, and the more so, as Constantinople would fall to the share of Austria, which would so far be a satisfactory arrangement to England, France, and Italy, as it would keep Russia out of the Mediterranean, where they do not desire her presence. The Turkish islands of the Archipelago might be transferred to Greece, which they are, generally, anxious to join. Nevertheless, this would be at most but a temporary change, as regards the existence of Turkey as an independent nation, which cannot but for a short period maintain its autonomy even in Asia. The Musselman sway was based on Mahometanism, and Mahometanism was based on force. The force is gone, its strength has dwindled away; the religion of the Koran is retreating before the religion of the Bible, and doctrines which could only be propagated by the sword are not of efficacy after the sword has lost its edge. Mahometanism cannot live face to face with modern civilization. The school-

master and the gospel must root it out, and Christianity be again established in Asia, from whence it came. The millions of Europe will pour into the land which was once the garden of the world, will rebuild its cities, and cultivate its fields, and "old things will be new again." Islam has devastated and made barren those noble regions, and the time is at hand when its evil influence must cease. If it exists at all, it must be driven back to its source, amid the sands and deserts of Arabia. This is not merely a religious, it is also an economical question, and the movement is acting with the certainty of a law of nature. Mahomet, even to the great body of Mahometans, will, before many generations are past, be no more a prophet, and his name will only survive as a legislator and reformer, which he undoubtedly was, regarded from a temporal point of view. He will take his place with Confucius, Zoraster, and Woden, unless, indeed, the future disciples of Mr. Carlyle should continue to consider him entitled to prophetic honours. His doctrines, and the empire which was founded on them, will pass away together.

But the question of more immediate interest is if the partition of Turkey will lead to war between those claiming to be the heirs of the sick man. There is imminent danger of such a result. Russia will not easily surrender her traditional policy of getting possession of Constantinople, and will perhaps think the northern Principalities scarcely a sufficient compensation for sacrificing that great object of her ambition. Austria, again, must seek territory in an eastern direction, to keep her in her place among the leading powers, and to make up for her losses in Germany and Italy. Turkey is destined, evidently, to be one of the chief objects of European intrigue and ambition for years to come; but under any circumstances her doom is sealed, and we repeat our conviction, that the day is not very distant when her place shall know her no more in the community of nations.

LONDON LETTER.

LONDON, September 13.

ITOLD you in my last, Mr. Editor, that I was going to Jersey. I have been, but I don't go again, if I know it, in such weather. It is all very well to sit on shore and sing about "a wet sheet and a flowing sail," to go into raptures over

"A life on the ocean wave,
A home on the rolling deep,"

and to vow that "the rover's life is the life for me;" but it is not so well to put the matter to a practical test. I wrote you last week in high spirits, and buoyant with bright anticipations. It strikes me you would not have recognised the writer in the woe-begone individual who landed at Jersey after twelve hours' experience of a channel gale, whose spirits were anything but high, and who was decidedly not buoyant with anything at all, but only anxious to lie down in peace. How I wished I could forswear the channel ever after, and take up my abode *en permanence* in Jersey. But this could not be, and hardly had I recovered from the effects of