

CHAPTER XVIII.—1846-1849.

A TERRIBLE CLOUD IN THE EAST—THE DREAD SPECTRE OF CHOLERA IN THE DISTANCE—IT STARTS FROM INDIA—MAKES ITS WAY WESTWARD—REACHES NEW YORK AND OTHER AMERICAN CITIES—VACATION SPENT AMONG THE PATIENTS—"GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF US, EITHER IN THIS WORLD OR THE NEXT"—MAKING MEDICINE—HAVE THE PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS OF THE DISEASE—STUMBLING OVER COFFINS IN THE HALLS—END OF THE HORRORS.

TOWARD the latter part of 1846, there came ominous news to our Institution—indicating that a great danger hung above us, and was soon to fall. We were no more alive to apprehension, in general matters, than were "seeing" people: but it must be admitted that this news cast a very sober feeling over our little band of students.

The dread epidemic of Cholera was coming! There seemed no way to stop it, when it once

Studying up the Cholera.

started on the warpath: medical methods at that time were largely inadequate.

The disease is now better understood and more easily fought, than in those days: Science has made many long and profitable marches since then, and brought back among its trophies the means of stamping it out or warding it off.

But in 1846, things were different, and it was as good as known that the dread spectre had started westward from the pestilence-laden streets and jungles of India, and that it was only a question of a little time when it would reach American shores.

We were not long in studying up everything that could be learned on the subject: those who read to us never had more attentive listeners than at that time. We learned that in 1817, when the eyes of physicians were first turned toward this disease, the frightened inhabitants of India were calling it "*Mordechie*"—Arabic for "Death-blow"—which sufficiently indicated its terrible character. It was said to have "originated" in a little town named Jessore, about seventy miles northeast of Calcutta: but that was, no doubt, merely where the epidemic of 1846-49 was first discovered.

The disease had existed for ages, in one

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place and another, and even a great Roman philosophical and medical writer named Celsus, who lived in the time of the emperor Augustus, made mention of it—or of something very much like it.

So the little town of Jessore may be termed merely the place where the terrible disease gathered its hosts, before starting out to overrun the world on this particular campaign.

In the early part of 1846, it descended upon Teheran, in Persia, and killed 20,000 people before it left the place. Sometimes it would poison one's blood all at once, and life would be extinct in a few hours. The disease went all over India, killed 6,380 British soldiers, as well as unnumbered hosts of natives, and, finally, itself an army of invasion, it drew up its lines of attack, and advanced into Europe.

By August, 1848, it was at Berlin, and about the close of September it reached that great camp of "all sorts and conditions" of people—London. Before it left England, it had taken over 70,000 lives.

It is needless to say that all these facts were watched with breathless anxiety, by the people in New York. Of course there were no cables in that day, or even any "ocean grayhounds": but numerous packet-ships and some slow steamers were constantly sailing back

Secure in God's Promise.

and forth, and news had facilities of travel, of which it did not fail to take full advantage.

It is a problem, and, no doubt, always will be, among physicians, and other scientists, as to how much the matter of fear has to do with the incurring of epidemic diseases, but one thing is certain: New York and its kindred American cities stood, for months, in dread of the terrible visitation, and tremblingly expected it from day to day; and, so to speak, were all ready to take it when it came.

As for the teachers and students in the Institution for the Blind, we of course had our fears: but we were taught that the same good Friend above, that had been so merciful thus far, would not desert us now; that He would do all things best for us, both in this world and the next. We rested secure in His promise that we should all be held in the hollow of His hand. And so we prayed—and waited.

We had not long to wait! On the first of December, 1848, the packet-ship "New York" landed at Staten Island. She was from Havre, and brought with her several persons who were suffering from cholera. Soon three deaths occurred in our city, and the dread disease was fighting the preliminary skirmish of its conquering march.

Everything possible in those days was done

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to keep the contagion down, and stamp it out; and for several months it looked as if this might be accomplished. But we were attacked from other directions.

On the 11th of December, an emigrant-ship arrived at New Orleans—having also come from Havre, leaving a few days before the "New York"; and this vessel, upon sailing into port, had already buried at sea seventeen who died of cholera. It was thought, at first, that there were no more cases on board, and the queen city of the South congratulated itself on having escaped.

But one poor sick woman, having been sent to the Charity Hospital, was soon found to be afflicted with the terrible disease; and in a few days it spread all over New Orleans—causing 3,500 deaths.

This thriving city of the South was then a great center of travel: sailing-vessels, flat-boats, and steamers, were constantly leaving, in all directions. Frequently after a steam-boat started up the river, there would be discovered upon her, several cases of cholera: and these would be hustled ashore at the first convenient landing, and left to the care of the hospitals, or of the people generally.

It soon reached Memphis, then St. Louis, then Cincinnati, Chicago, etc., and on the

A Doleful Vacation.

11th of May, 1849, New York had to acknowledge that the terrible pestilence was at last with her to stay for a time, having obtained a firm foothold within her streets. Before the month was out, Albany, Philadelphia, and Boston were all similarly afflicted; and soon a reign of terror was at hand.

Our summer vacation began unusually early, that year, and the students were sent to their homes as soon as possible; but several stayed long enough to suffer from the scourge.

Some of us remained all summer, from choice: being convinced that God would take care of us, and that we could be of some help. Our faithful nurse, who had always been so kind whenever we were ailing, refused to leave her post; and we felt that we could afford to run equal risks with her.

I never shall forget the terrors of that summer, in which there were, during six months, over 5,000 deaths in New York City alone. The harsh cry of the truckman, "Bring out your dead!" sometimes rings in my ears to this day.

Our Institution furnished some of these: several sickened and died almost before we could raise a hand to help them. Often the vital power seemed to ebb all at once, as soon as the victim was attacked. If we could get

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our patients into a state of perspiration, there was hope; and we used to rub them vigorously with salt in order to accomplish this.

Dr. J. W. Clements, who was our physician at that time, was often busy making "cholera pills"—and many a time I assisted him in their manufacture. They were of two-thirds calomel, and one-third opium—rather a "strenuous" sort of medicine for these days, it would be considered: but the necessity at that time seemed to justify the means.

One morning, I was quite sure that the dread disease had come upon me: indeed, I really had the premonitory symptoms. But I was bound that I would not yield to them: and the amount of calomel and opium that went into my stomach during those few hours, appals me as I think of it now.

All day long I kept exercising, as briskly and vigorously as I could; and when six o'clock came, I went to bed and to sleep, after having prayed to the great Physician of all, to watch over my slumber, and do with me as seemed best to Him.

In the morning, after a good night's rest, I awoke, as well as ever: and did not have any more trouble of that kind.

But the horrors of the situation grew upon us day by day. When patients died, they

Stumbling Over Coffins.

were removed as quietly as possible: but I remember my fright at sometimes stumbling over coffins in the halls, on my way from room to room.

When November came, the epidemic ceased; and our school went on as usual. As above stated, several had died from among our number, and we mourned them long and deeply: but not without the reflection that they were in God's hands, and that He had His own wise purpose in taking them to Himself.