

Papists. He claimed a dispensing power as to the relaxation of penal laws in ecclesiastical matters. The Parliament gently denied the king's right to this dispensing power, and a Bill to confirm that power was dropped, to Charles's great displeasure. In the constitutional point of the duration of Parliaments, the Crown was more successful in carrying out its own desires. By the Triennial Act of 1641, in default of the king summoning a new parliament within three years after a dissolution, the peers might issue writs; or the sheriffs in default of the peers; or in default of constituted authorities the people might elect their representatives without any summons whatever. These provisions against such violations of the constitution as had been seen in the time of Charles I., could not affect a sovereign who desired to govern in connection with Parliaments. Charles, in his opening speech in the session of 1664, said, "I need not tell you how much I love Parliaments. Never king was so much beholden to Parliaments as I have been; nor do I think the Crown can ever be happy without frequent Parliaments. But, assure yourselves, if I should think otherwise, I would never suffer a Parliament to come together by the means prescribed by that Bill."* The first Charles, in the pride of his triumphant despotism, could not have made a more insolent avowal. The famous Triennial Act was repealed; all its provisions for holding Parliaments in defiance of an arbitrary power of the Crown were set aside; and yet it was declared that Parliaments should not be suspended for more than three years. Charles II. lived to violate this law.

The first war in which the government of the restored monarchy was engaged originated in the commercial rivalry of the English and the Dutch. The African Company of England and the African Company of Holland quarrelled about the profits derived from slaves and gold-dust. They had fought for some miserable forts on the African coast; and gradually the contests of the traders assumed the character of national warfare. The merchants petitioned Parliament to redress their injuries; the House of Commons listened with ready ear; the king saw plentiful supplies about to be granted him, some of which might be diverted from their destined use; the duke of York was desirous of showing his prowess as Lord High Admiral. War was declared; and on the 3rd of June, 1665, the fleets of the two great commercial nations were engaged off Lowestoffe. The victory was complete

* "Parliament Hist.," vol. iv. col. 291.

on the side of England. The old sailors of the Commonwealth had still some animating remembrances of Blake, with which they inspired the emulation of their new comrades. The duke of York was not deficient in animal courage; and the courtiers who served as volunteers had not lost the national daring in their self-indulgence. But the victory raised no shouts of exultation in the marts and thoroughfares of London. The great City was lying under the dread of the most terrible infliction, which was approaching to sweep away a third of its crowded population. The destroying angel was abroad: his avenging weapon was The Plague!

The June of 1665 comes in with extraordinary heat. The previous winter and spring had been the driest that ever man knew. The summer was coming with the same cloudless sky. There was no grass in the meadows around London. "Strange comets, which filled the thoughts and writings of astronomers, did in the winter and spring a long time appear." The "great comet," says Burnet, "raised the apprehensions of those who did not enter into just speculations concerning those matters." The boom of guns from the Norfolk coast is heard upon the Thames; and the merchants upon Change are anxiously waiting for letters from the fleet. In the coffee houses, two subjects of news keep the gossipers in agitation—the Dutch fleet is off our coast, the Plague is in the City. The 7th of June, writes Pepys, was "the hottest day that ever I felt in my life. This day, much against my will, I did in Drury Lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and 'Lord have mercy upon us' writ there; which was a sad sight to me, being the first of the kind that to my remembrance I ever saw." The red cross upon the doors was too familiar to the elder population of London. In 1636, of twenty-three thousand deaths ten thousand were ascribed to the Plague. The terrible visitor came to London, according to the ordinary belief, once in every twenty years, and then swept away a fifth of the inhabitants. From 1636 to 1647 there had been no cessation of the malady, which commonly carried off two or three thousand people annually. But after 1648 there had been no record of deaths from the Plague amounting to more than twenty, in any one year. In 1664 the Bills of Mortality only registered six deaths from this cause. The disease seemed almost to belong to another generation than that which had witnessed the triumph and the fall of Puritanism—which had passed from extreme formalism to extreme licentiousness. How far the drunken revelries of the five

years of the Restoration might have predisposed the population to receive the disease, is as uncertain as any belief that the sobriety of the preceding time had warded it off. One condition of London was, however, unaltered. It was a city of narrow streets and of bad drainage. The greater number of houses were deficient in many of the accommodations upon which health, in a great degree, depends. The supply of water was far from sufficient for the wants of the poorer population; and with the richer classes the cost of water, supplied either by hand-labour or machinery, prevented its liberal use. The conduits, old or new, could only afford to fill a few water-cans daily for household uses. There was much finery in the wealthy citizens' houses, but little cleanliness. It is to be remarked, however, that the Plague of 1665 was as fatal in the less crowded parts of Westminster and its suburbs, as in the City within the walls. Building had been going forward from the time of Elizabeth in St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, and in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields; and we might conclude that the streets would be wider and the houses more commodious in these new parts than in the close thoroughfares, over which the projecting eaves had hung for many a year, shutting out air and light. But in these suburban liberties the Plague of 1665 first raged, and then gradually extended eastward. On the 10th of June the disease broke out in the City, in the house of Dr. Burnett, a physician, in Fenchurch Street. "I saw poor Dr. Burnett's door shut; but he hath, I hear, gained great good will among his neighbours; for he discovered it himself first, and caused himself to be shut up of his own accord—which was very handsome." This is a quaint comment upon the good doctor's voluntary subjection to misery worse than death—to be shut up—with the red-cross on the door; no one coming with help or consolation; all stricken with the selfishness of terror.*

* There is a remarkable picture of a solitary man abiding in a house whilst the plague was around him, written by one who has many of the qualities of the true poet. George Wither, during the Plague of 1625, resolved to remain in his lodging in London, and thus he describes a night of "darkness and loneliness:"—

"My chamber entertain'd me all alone,
And in the rooms adjoining lodged none.
Yet, through the darksome silent night, did fly
Sometime an uncouth noise; sometime a cry;
And sometime mournful callings pierc'd my room,
Which came, I neither knew from whence, nor whom.

And oft, betwixt awaking and asleep,
Their voices, who did talk, or pray, or weep,
Unto my list'ning ears a passage found,
And troubled me, by their uncertain sound."

Defoe's famous "Journal of the Plague Year" has made this terrible season familiar to most readers. The spirit of accuracy is now more required than when the editor of a popular work informed his readers that Defoe continued in London during the whole time of the plague, and was one of the Examiners appointed to shut up infected houses.* Defoe, in 1665, was four years old. Yet the imaginary saddler of Whitechapel, who embodies the stories which this wonderful writer had treasured up from his childhood, relates nothing that is not supported by what we call authentic history. The "Citizen who continued all the while in London," as the title of Defoe's Journal informs us, and whose dwelling was "without Aldgate, about midway between Aldgate church and Whitechapel bars," relates how, through May and June, the nobility and rich people from the west part of the city filled the broad street of Whitechapel with coaches and waggons and carts, all hurrying away with goods, women, servants, and children; how horsemen, with servants bearing their baggage, followed in this mournful cavalcade, from morning to night; how the lord mayor's doors were crowded with applicants for passes and certificates of health, for without these none would be allowed to enter the towns, or rest in any wayside-inn. The citizen of Whitechapel thought "of the misery that was coming upon the city, and the unhappy condition of those who would be left in it." On the 21st of June, Pepys writes, "I find all the town almost going out of town; the coaches and waggons being all full of people going into the country." In the country the population dreaded to see the Londoners. Baxter remarks, "How fearful people were thirty, or forty, if not an hundred miles from London, of anything that they bought from any mercer's or draper's shop; or of any goods that were brought to them; or of any persons that came to their houses. How they would shut their doors against their friends; and if a man passed over the fields, how one would avoid another, as we did in the time of wars; and how every man was a terror to another." The Broadstone of East Redford, on which an exchange was made of money for goods, without personal communication, is an illustration of these rural terrors. A panic very soon took possession of the population of London. They talked of the comet, "of a faint, dull, languid colour, and its motion very heavy, solemn, and slow." They read 'Lilly's Almanac,' and 'Gadbury's Astrological Predictions,' and 'Poor Robin's Almanac,' and these

* "Beauties of England and Wales."

books "frightened them terribly." A man walked the streets day and night, at a swift pace, speaking to no one, but uttering only the words "O the great and the dreadful God!" These prognostications and threatenings came before the pestilence had become very serious; and they smote down the hearts of the people, and thus unfitted them for the duty of self-preservation, and the greater duty of affording help to others. Other impostors than the astrologers abounded. The mountebank was in the streets with his "infallible preventive pills," and "the only true plague-water." Pepys records that "my lady Carteret did this day give me a bottle of plague-water home with me." But gradually the astrologers and the quacks were left without customers, for London was almost wholly abandoned to the very poorest. Touchingly does Baxter say, "the calamities and cries of the diseased and impoverished are not to be conceived by those who are absent from them The richer sort remaining out of the city, the greatest blow fell on the poor." The Court fled on the first appearance of the disease. Some few of the great remained, amongst others the stout old duke of Albemarle, who fearlessly chewed his tobacco at his mansion of the Cockpit. Marriages of the rich still went on. Pepys is diffuse about a splendid marriage at Dagenham's, which narrative reads like the contrasts of a chapter of romance. "Thus I ended this month (July) with the greatest joy that ever I did any in my life, because I have spent the greatest part of it with abundance of joy, and honour, and pleasant journeys, and brave entertainments, and without cost of money." A week after, he writes, "Home, to draw over anew my will, which I had bound myself by oath to dispatch to-morrow night, the town growing so unhealthy that a man cannot depend upon living two days."

The narrative of Defoe, and other relations, have familiarised most of us from our boyhood with the ordinary facts of this terrible calamity. We see the searchers, and nurses, and watchmen, and buryers marching in ominous silence through the empty streets, each bearing the red wand of office. We see them enter a suspected house, and upon coming out marking the door with the fatal red cross, a foot in length. If the sick within can pay, a nurse is left. We see the dead-cart going its rounds in the night, and hear the bell tinkling, and the buryers crying "Bring out your dead." Some of the infected were carried to the established pest-houses, where the dead-cart duly received its ghastly load. The saddler of Whitechapel describes what he beheld at "the great pit

of the churchyard of our parish at Aldgate:—"I saw two links come over from the end of the Minories, and heard the bellman, and then appeared a dead-cart, as they called it, coming over the streets, so I could no longer resist my desire of seeing it, and went in. . . . It had in it sixteen or seventeen bodies; some were wrapt up in linen sheets, some in rugs, some little other than naked, or so loose that what covering they had fell from them in the shooting out of the cart, and they fell quite naked amongst the rest; but the matter was not much to them, nor the indecency to any one else, seeing that they were all dead, and were to be huddled together into the common grave of mankind, as we may call it, for here is no difference made, but poor and rich went together; there was no other way of burials, neither was it possible there should, for coffins were not to be had for the prodigious numbers that fell in such a calamity as this." Soon, as Pepys tells us on the 12th of August, "the people die so, that now it seems they are fain to carry the dead to be buried by day light, the night not sufficing to do it in." The terrors which the sleek Secretary of the Navy feels when he thus encounters a dead body are almost ludicrous. The Reverend Thomas Vincent, one of the non-conforming clergy who remained in the city, has thus described the scenes of August: "Now people fall as thick as the leaves in autumn when they are shaken by a mighty wind. Now there is a dismal solitude in London streets; every day looks with the face of a Sabbath-day, observed with a greater solemnity than it used to be in the city. Now shops are shut in, people rare and very few that walk about, insomuch that the grass begins to spring up in some places, and a deep silence in every place, especially within the walls. No prancing horses, no rattling coaches, no calling in customers nor offering wares, nor London cries sounding in the ears. If any voice be heard it is the groans of dying persons breathing forth their last, and the funeral knells of them that are ready to be carried to their graves. Now shutting up of visited houses (there being so many) is at an end, and most of the well are mingled among the sick, which otherwise would have got no help. Now, in some places where the people did generally stay, not one house in a hundred but what is affected; and in many houses half the family is swept away; in some, from the eldest to the youngest; few escaped but with the death of one or two. Never did so many husbands and wives die together; never did so many parents carry their children with them to the grave, and go together into the

same house under earth who had lived together in the same house upon it. Now the nights are too short to bury the dead: the whole day, though at so great a length, is hardly sufficient to light the dead that fall thereon into their graves." At the beginning of September the empty streets put on another aspect, equally fearful. The bonfire, which was the exhibition of gladness, was now the token of desolation. Every six houses on each side of the way were to be assessed towards the expense of maintaining one great fire in the middle of the street for the purification of the air,—fires which were not to be extinguished by night or by day. A heavy rain put out these death-fires, and perhaps did far more good than this expedient. As winter approached, the disease began rapidly to decrease. Confidence a little revived. A few shops were again opened. The York wagon again ventured to go to London with passengers. At the beginning of 1666 "the town fills again." "Pray God," says Pepys, "continue the Plague's decrease; for that keeps the Court away from the place of business, and so all goes to rack as to public matters." He rides in Lord Brouncker's coach to Covent Garden: "What staring to see a nobleman's coach come to town. And porters everywhere bow to us: and such begging of beggars." The sordid and self-indulgent now began to come back: "January 22nd. The first meeting of Gresham College since the plague. Dr. Goddard did fill us with talk, in defence of his and his fellow-physicians' going out of town in the plague-time; saying that their particular patients were most gone out of town, and they left at liberty, and a great deal more." This is Pepys' entry of the 4th of February: "Lord's day: and my wife and I the first time together at church since the plague, and now only because of Mr. Mills his coming home to preach his first sermon; expecting a great excuse for his leaving the parish before anybody went, and now staying till all are come home: but he made but a very poor and short excuse, and a bad sermon." Mr. Mills, and his doings, and the doings of such as Mr. Mills, were not without important consequences, which bring us back to the political history of this time of suffering, in which the few manifested a noble devotion to their duty, and the many exhibited the more general characteristic of their generation—intense selfishness. De-foe tells, with the strictest accuracy, the mode in which the spiritual condition of the plague-struck city was attended to: "Though it is true that a great many of the clergy did shut up their churches, and fled as other people did, for the safety of their lives, yet all

did not do so; some ventured to officiate, and to keep up the assemblies of the people by constant prayers, and sometimes sermons, or brief exhortations to repentance and reformation, and this as long as they would hear them. And dissenters did the like also and even in the very churches where the parish ministers were either dead or fled; nor was there any room for making any difference at such a time as this was." Baxter also relates that, when "most of the conformable ministers fled, and left their flocks in the time of their extremity," the non-conforming ministers, who, since 1662, had done their work very privately, "resolved to stay with the people; and to go into the forsaken pulpits, though prohibited; and to preach to the poor people before they died; and also to visit the sick, and get what relief they could for the poor, especially those that were shut up." The reward which the non-conforming ministers received for their good work was "The Five Mile Act."

The Statute which popularly bore this name is entitled "An Act for restraining Non-conformists from inhabiting in Corporations."* In consequence of the plague raging in London, the Parliament met at Oxford on the 9th of October. Their first Act was for a supply of 1,250,000*l.* Their second was this "new and more inevitable blow aimed at the fallen Church of Calvin."† All persons in holy orders who had not subscribed the Act of Uniformity were required to take the following oath: "I, A. B., do swear, that it is not lawful, under any pretence whatsoever, to take arms against the king; and that I do abhor the traitorous position of taking arms by his authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him, in pursuance of such commissions; and that I will not at any time endeavour any alteration of government either in Church or State." In default of taking this oath they were forbidden to dwell, or come, unless upon the road, within five miles of any corporate town, or any other place where they had been ministers, or had preached, under a penalty of Forty Pounds and six months' imprisonment. They were also declared incapable of teaching in schools, or of receiving boarders. This Act had for its object wholly to deprive the conscientious Puritans of any means of subsistence connected with their former vocation of Christian ministers or instructors of youth. Mr. Hallam truly says, "The Church of England had doubtless her provocations; but she made the retaliation much more than commensurate to the injury. No severity comparable to this cold-blooded persecution had been inflicted by the late powers, even in the ferment and fury of a civil

* 17 Car. II. c. 2.

† Hallam.

war." An attempt was made to impose the non-resisting oath upon the whole nation; but it was defeated by a small majority.

The extent of the miseries inflicted by the Plague in London was probably diminished by "The Settlement Act" of 1662.* This was entitled "An Act for the better relief of the Poor." The preamble of the Statute declares the continual increase of the Poor, not only within the cities of London and Westminster, but also through the whole kingdom; but there is little reason to doubt that the main object of the Bill was to thrust out from the parishes of the metropolis, all chargeable persons occupying tenements under the yearly value of ten pounds. By this Act the power of removal was first established—a measure which, however modified, has done as much evil to the labouring population in destroying their habits of self-dependence, as a legal provision for their support, prudently administered, has been a national blessing. The Settlement Act was carried by the metropolitan members, with little resistance from the country members. "The habitual congregating of the vagrant classes in London, and the dread of pestilence likely to be thereby engendered, appear to have overborne or neutralised all other considerations at the time, and hastened the passing of the Act."† The united efforts made by the Londoners to carry this Bill, leave little room to doubt that they acted upon it very promptly and vigilantly; and thus some considerable portion of the indigent population must have been driven forth from London and Westminster, to seek their parishes under the old laws which determined their lawful place of abode. The ten pound rental, either in London or the country, could protect none of the really indigent. It gave a privilege only to the well-to-do artisan or tradesman who had no legal settlement by birth, apprenticeship, or other legal claim. In 1675, in a debate on a Bill for restraint of building near London, one member said that "by the late Act the poor are hunted like foxes out of parishes, and whither must they go but where there are houses?" Another declared that "the Act for the settlement of the poor does, indeed, thrust all people out of the country to London."‡ The intent of the framers of the Act had probably been defeated by the reprisals of the rural magistrates and overseers. The system of hunting the poor went on amidst the perpetual litigation of nearly two centuries; and it is not yet come to an end.

* 14 Car. II. c. 12.

† Sir G. Nicholls: "History of the English Poor Law," vol. i. p. 297.

‡ "Parl. Hist." vol. iv. col. 679.

CHAPTER VIII.

Naval affairs.—Annus Mirabilis.—France joins the Dutch against England.—The sea-fight of four days.—The London Gazette.—Restraints upon the Press.—Ravages of the English fleet on the Dutch Coast.—The Great Fire of London.—Note, on Wren's Plan for rebuilding the City.

THE naval victory of the 3rd of June, 1665, was a fruitless triumph, won at a lavish expenditure of blood. The most loyal of the subordinate administrators of public affairs considered that a great success had been thrown away. Evelyn writes, (June 8th) "Came news of his highness' victory, which indeed might have been a complete one, and at once ended the war, had it been pursued; but the cowardice of some, or treachery, or both, frustrated that." When the Dutch fled from off Lowestoffe to their own shores, the English fleet commenced a pursuit; but in the night the King Charles, the duke of York's ship, slackened sail and brought to. In a Council of War, as Burnet relates upon the authority of the earl of Montague, Admiral Penn affirmed that they must prepare for hotter work in the next engagement; for he well knew the courage of the Dutch was never so high as when they were desperate. The courtiers said that the duke had got honour enough, and why should he venture a second time. His royal highness went to sleep; and in the night Brunkhard, one of his servants, delivered an order to the master of the King Charles to slacken sail, which order purported to be written by the duke. The House of Commons instituted an inquiry; and it was alleged that Brunkhard forged the order. Burnet says, "Lord Montague did believe that the duke was *struck*, seeing the earl of Falmouth, the king's favourite, and two other persons of quality, killed very near him; and that he had no mind to engage again." Some members of the House of Commons thought it a very desirable thing for the nation that the king's brother should incur no more such dangers. The duke remained at home, to contribute his share to the scandals which the Court habitually provoked, whether at Whitehall or at Oxford.

The Plague-year has passed; the "Year of Wonders" is come.