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THE
PLAGUE OF MARSEILLES.



THE
PLAGUE OF MARSEILLES
IN
THE YEAR 1720.

FROM DOCUMENTS PRESERVED IN THE ARCHIVES OF
THE CITY,

AND PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY, IN THE YEAR 1820.

BY JOHN IRELAND, D. D.

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER.

READ AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, MAY 26, 1834.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN a paper on the "Plague of Athens," read at the Royal College of Physicians, Feb. 27, 1832, allusion was incidentally made to the Plague of Marseilles, and a wish expressed for more authentic information concerning its origin and character.

Since that time the kindness of a friend¹ has obtained for me a copy of the work alluded to in the title-page.

It is a collection of historical documents, in two volumes, concerning the Plague of Marseilles, and of some parts of Provence, in

¹ Mr. James Morier.

the years 1720, 1721, and 1722.¹ The first volume, in two parts, contains the principal papers relating to Marseilles itself; namely, a Journal of the Transactions during the Plague, from May 20 to December 10, 1720; Letters and Public Addresses of the Bishop to the Clergy and People; Orders from the Council of State; Opinions of Physicians concerning the Disease; and other notices connected with the subject.

In the second volume, also in two parts, are accounts of the extension of the Plague to Aix, Arles, Toulon, and other places; with a Memoir, read at the Academy of Sciences at Marseilles, in 1819, preparatory to the publication

¹ Pièces Historiques sur la Peste de 1720, 1721, et 1722, trouvées dans les Archives de l'Hôtel de Ville, dans celles de la Préfecture, au Bureau de l'Administration Sanitaire, et dans le Cabinet des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de Marseille, publiées en 1820, à l'occasion de l'année séculaire de la Peste.

of the volumes in question in the succeeding or secular year.

It is with the first volume the following paper is chiefly concerned, though notice is occasionally taken of other parts of the work. It consists of a brief narrative reduced from the Journal; the substance of the opinion of the physicians sent by the court to inquire into the nature of the disorder; and a few observations which occurred to me from the perusal of the whole collection.

When the paper was completed, it was submitted to the judgment of Sir Henry Hallford as a sequel to the former. Sir Henry perused it with his accustomed indulgence, and obligingly wished that it might be read to the Royal College. It is almost needless to say that after the experience of so much kindness it was impossible not to acquiesce in the proposal;

and the paper had the honour of being read by the President, on May 26, 1834.

I will only add, as my apology for engaging once more in a discussion foreign from my general pursuits, that if I had not considered the present paper as exhibiting a decided specimen of the Levant Plague, and its characteristic difference from the Plague of Athens, I should not have ventured on the preparation of it; and that, having done this, I have completed my view of a subject to which I was first led by accident alone.

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THE
PLAGUE OF MARSEILLES.

ON the 25th of May, 1720, a trading vessel arrived at Marseilles from the coast of the Levant,¹ with clean bills of health, the plague not having appeared there till after her departure. In her voyage, however, she touched at Leghorn, where some of her crew died of what was supposed by the physicians of that place to be malignant fever.

Another sailor having died, two days after the arrival at Marseilles, the body was inspected by the principal surgeon who superintended the health of that port, and who found no mark of contagion on it. The same judgment was

¹ De Seïde, de Tripoli de Syrie, et de Chypre.—Vol. i. p. 33.

afterwards pronounced, by the same authority, on one of the guards who had been stationed in the vessel to enforce the quarantine, and who died on board.

Between this time and the end of June, other vessels arrived from the same coast, with foul bills, the plague having shown itself before their voyage began. Several deaths afterwards occurred on board all these vessels, nor was it till the 8th of July that the first decided mark of contagion—a swelling in the upper part of the thigh—was discovered on one of the bodies.¹ From that time precautions began to be taken; the bodies were interred in quick-lime, and their clothes burnt. The marine council, the president of the parliament, and the governor of Provence,² were informed of the apparent danger. The physicians also openly reported to the magistracy such cases of infection as fell

¹ Le chirurgien lui trouve une enflure à la partie supérieure de la cuisse, et alors il déclare que cela lui parat une marque de contagion, et qu'il demande à consulter.—Vol. i. p. 36.

² The Marshal Duke de Villars; *ib.* Compare vol. ii. p. 367.

under their notice ; and the patients were immediately removed to the infirmaries beyond the walls.

These measures having prevented the immediate spread of the disorder, the common people, ever suspicious and violent, began to indulge their animosity against the physicians and surgeons, whom they openly insulted, and accused of causing false alarms injurious to the town.¹ For a while, the authorities were compelled to give way to this caprice ; and, in the report of the cases, their language was prudentially softened, though the disorder was still treated as real plague. The murmurs of the people indeed were soon suppressed by the progress of the disorder itself, which showed its character in the undoubted marks of bubos, and fell with particular violence on the poor and crowded population of the old part of the town ; nor was it long ere the contagion reached all classes

¹ On insulte aux médecins et aux chirurgiens d'avoir donné, par leur erreur, l'alarme à toute la ville.—Vol. i. p. 39.

of the inhabitants. The terror became general, and great numbers fled from the place.

Among those who remained, tumults began also to prevail. Supplies from the country being now suspended, through the dread of infection, the bakers were unable to furnish the usual distribution of bread, and were threatened by the populace. The troops stationed at the fort, not receiving their customary allowances, were on the point of mutiny, and the public chest was nearly exhausted.¹ Under these circumstances, earnest petitions were addressed to the Regent Duke of Orleans for succours, without which the town must perish. Attempts were also made to relieve the place by sending away the beggars and poor who did not belong to it. But this was now impracticable, as the parliament had just passed a severe edict against the admission of any person coming

¹ Il ne se trouve, pour toutes espèces, que 1100 livres dans la caisse de la communauté.—Vol. i. pp. 42—47.

from Marseilles into any of the towns or places of Provence.¹

Till other relief could be obtained, the authorities were therefore compelled to act for themselves. The city engaged to borrow money at any interest, to meet the pressing exigency. A market was opened with the neighbourhood, under a new and safe management. The provisions wanted were brought to certain spots agreed upon, and carried from thence into the town, without the personal approach of those concerned in the traffic. Guards were placed to prevent all needless communication with the more infected parts of the town itself, and commissaries appointed to distribute provisions to them. Companies of militia were also formed to escort the public functionaries in removing the dead and carrying the sick to the in-

¹ La Chambre des Vacations du Parlement d'Aix a rendu un arrêt, portant défense aux Marseillais de sortir des limites de leur terroir, &c.; vol. i. 43. Compare vol. ii. pp. 23, 26, 38. See also the Royal Edict, vol. i. pp. 147, 148.

firmaries, and to enforce obedience. A power was also requested from the Crown,¹ as in former cases of the like nature, to try on the spot, and to punish, any who might be guilty of riotous conduct, or of a violation of the public orders during the calamity.

The number of the sick meanwhile increased, and further assistance was requisite. The more vigorous of the poor were therefore formed into companies for the purpose not only of removing the dead bodies, but of digging deep ditches beyond the walls for a larger and safer interment than could be afforded by the churches. Pest hospitals were also formed. It is observable, that within two days after these were opened for the reception of patients, they were completely filled; and the only relief, if it

¹ The dates of some former plagues at Marseilles are incidentally conveyed through this fact. Les échevins, considérant les désordres qui arrivent souvent en tems de contagion, et que toutes les fois que cette ville a été affligée de la peste, comme en 1580, 1630, 1649, et 1650, nos rois ont toujours octroyé à leurs prédécesseurs, par des lettres patentes, le pouvoir de juger de tous crimes, &c.—Vol. i. p. 48.

might be so termed, from this inconvenience, was found in the rapidity of the deaths. The hospitals, indeed, became only a sort of resting-places, momentarily full, and as speedily vacant to receive other brief tenants, destined, in their turn, to cede their room to their hastening successors.¹

Amidst these dangers the mortality among the assistants themselves became also alarming. The country people, who had been hired at high wages, with their carts, to remove the dead bodies, mostly caught the infection and perished; while many of the most active and zealous persons of the place had also died, or were totally exhausted with fatigue. Under these circumstances, it was imagined, that a new and more efficient help might be obtained from the galleys in the harbour. With the per-

¹ Le mal est si violent, que ceux qui y entrent le soir, vont le lendemain dans les fosses; et les hopitaux n'étant ainsi qu'un reposoir d'un moment, les morts chaque jour, successivement, y font place aux nouveaux malades.—Vol. i. p. 54.

mission, therefore, of the commander, a detachment of the convicts condemned to labour on board these vessels was landed, under promise of liberty, if they duly performed the service required of them; and, on express application to the government, a larger number was afterwards added.¹ That these men were useful, from their daring disposition and scorn of danger, is certain. But they came, quite unprovided with necessary clothing, at a time when scarcely a tradesman was able to supply them. They were also to be fed, while the greatest scarcity prevailed, and were to be lodged, amidst the repugnance felt by all the inhabitants to admit them into their houses. The moral evil which they brought with them was, indeed, scarcely less than that of the plague which they

¹ From the 20th of August, 1720, to the 4th of January, 1721, were granted for this service 692 convicts and six Turks, besides the 26 convicts first sent by the commander of the galleys. Of the whole number sent by the express order of the crown, 241 only appeared at the muster in May, 1721. Compare vol. i. p. 59 with vol. ii. p. 191.

were called to encounter ; and it was a new burden on the authorities of the place to watch the conduct of their very assistants. Into whatever houses they went to collect the bodies, they carried the evil habits of their lives, plundering¹ and ill-treating those who were already afflicted with the loss of their friends, and trembling for their own safety from the growing fury of the pest. In the performance of their service, too, they were equally unskilful and unfeeling ; and in conducting the carts filled with the dead, they often overturned them, regardless of all consequences, and insolently leaving the sad remains on the spot.

From this time, about the middle of August, the disorder may be regarded as having nearly arrived at the height at which it continued to rage till the beginning of October. During this dreadful period, the deaths were so constant and numerous, that all attempts to dispose of the

¹ Ils pillent et volent dans toutes les maisons où ils vont prendre les morts.—Vol. i. p. 60.

bodies, within or without the walls, were fruitless, and the inhabitants had no other resource than to bring them out at the doors and to lay them in the streets. It appears almost to surpass belief, but the Journal expressly affirms, that in one day occurred nearly a thousand deaths;¹ and almost the same mortality continued for some days together.

All hope seemed now to be abandoned, and all effort with it. All occupations were given up, except such as were unavoidable; and nearly all religious offices ceased in the churches;² the priests who survived being afraid to officiate, or no congregation appearing to communicate. Hence occurred that dreadful yet heroic scene which marks, in so peculiar a manner, the

¹ Ce jour, près de mille personnes meurent.—Vol. i. pp. 67—70.

² One church indeed is mentioned in which service was still performed, and the bishop's own chapel was never shut. "On allait entendre la messe dans sa chapelle. Tout le monde y était reçu sans distinction, et il y donnoit la communion."—Vol. i. pp. 234, 260. He performed mass also on Sundays, at the door of one of the churches, and baptized the children of the poor in that quarter, when the incumbents could no longer be found.—Vol. i. p. 254.

Plague of Marseilles. Many of the dying, as well as the dead, being brought out of the houses into the streets and laid in the shade of the trees in the public places, or under the awnings of shops in the streets,¹ the confession and preparation of the expiring patients took place on the spot, the bishop, attended by such of his clergy as remained, appearing among the sufferers, and administering to them the last consolations. The conduct of this amiable and intrepid man is indeed affectionately described by those who witnessed it from day to day. “ He does not confine himself to the offering of prayers at the altar for the divine mercy towards the people. Every day he appears in all quarters of the town, visiting the sick and making his way to the most miserable dwellings across the bodies which everywhere possess the streets and

¹ Sous chaque arbre du cours et des places publiques, sous l'auvent de chaque boutique des rues et du port, on y voit entre tous ces cadavres un nombre prodigieux de pauvres malades, et même de familles toutes entières, étendues misérablement sur un peu de paille, ou sur de mauvais matelas.—Vol. i. pp. 75, 79.

public places. The most wretched objects are his especial care. He approaches them without fear, exhorts them to patience, confesses them, and prepares them for the death which awaits them. His liberality is not less conspicuous than his piety. Already he has expended twenty-five thousand crowns, the only money at his immediate command, and is making every effort to obtain more on his personal credit to meet the wants of the poor and afflicted."¹ But to return to the narrative.

In the streets were sometimes seen miserable persons walking with hurried and irregular steps. Of these some had a livid and languid appearance, as if life had already in part abandoned them. Some, too, became delirious with the violence of the disease, and wandered they knew not whither; but soon falling down exhausted, and unable to lift themselves from the ground, they expired on the spot, remaining

¹ Vol. i. p. 84. Compare *ib.* p. 254.

fixed in the strange and distorted attitudes in which their agonies had left them. Other sufferers were so violently agitated as to be no longer under any self-possession. They seemed, indeed, intent only on destroying themselves in whatever manner they could, running headlong into the sea, or precipitating themselves from the windows of their houses, and escaping from insupportable terror by voluntary and immediate death.¹

In this sad scene, the extinction of the social affections was as dreadful as the disease itself. Husbands and wives, parents and children, and the nearest friends and connexions hastened to escape from each other, and an exclusive selfishness took possession of every heart. Some were thrust out of their houses by the other inmates through fear of infection from them. Some

¹ Il en est même d'agitées par de si violens transports, qu'elles s'égorgeent elles-mêmes, se précipitent dans la mer, ou se jettent des fenêtres de leurs maisons, pour mettre fin à leurs maux et à leurs peines, et prévenir la mort, qui ne peut tarder long tems.—Vol. i. p. 77.

quitted their homes of their own accord, lest by remaining within they should be left alone by the flight of the rest of the family. Others went forth to ask admission to the hospitals; but there being no room for them, and multitudes already waiting at the doors to be received, they gave themselves over to despair, seeking a certain death among the dead who lay heaped on each other in the streets.¹

But it would be too distressing to pursue the melancholy history through this most destructive period. Not till nearly the middle of October did the hospitals afford a gleam of hope that the disorder had begun to abate. The number of patients reported as recovering was now increased, and a class of convalescents was formed who were removed to other and more wholesome places.² Instead, therefore, of more

¹ Vol. i. p. 79.

² Vol. i. p. 111. A circumstance is marked in the Journal, which, however trivial in itself, became important to the feelings which had been so long oppressed with terror. The bells, which had not been

particulars of the late sufferings, it will be sufficient to draw the attention to two circumstances only, from which a conclusion may be formed as to the rest.

It has been already stated, that on one day died nearly a thousand patients, and that so startling a mortality was not confined to one day. The consequence at length was, that all efforts to remove the bodies for interment being overpowered by the continual accumulation, a larger and larger number was left in the streets; and at one time more than two thousand bodies lay unburied in various quarters of the town, without counting those that remained within the houses.¹

With this was connected another tremendous fact. A great number of dead bodies being left within the houses, those who were nearest to

rung during the sad period, were again set in motion, and were once more heard with refreshment and delight.—Vol. i. p. 113.

¹ Il en reste sur le pavé des rues plus de deux milles cadavres, sans compter ceux qui sont partout dans les maisons.—Ib. p. 86.

that infection resolved to deliver themselves from an evil which they could no longer endure. But they waited till night came, when they might be less observed; and, drawing the bodies forth into the streets, removed them as far as possible from their own dwellings.¹ This, however, was soon perceived by the unhappy inmates of the neighbouring houses, whose own miseries would not allow any addition to them from another quarter. Horror, resentment, and a desire of retaliation, arose from the clandestine and loathsome invasion, till, at length, all the afflicted parties were silently content to deposit the bodies on both sides of the streets,² where, when those who had conducted the public interments were themselves dead, they

¹ Ils le font pendant la nuit, pour être libres de les trainer le plus loin qu'ils peuvent de leurs maisons, et de les laisser étendus devant celle d'un autre, qui frémit le lendemain matin d'y trouver cet hideux objet qui l'infecte et lui porte l'horreur et la mort.—Vol. i. p. 75.

² The bishop observes this in one of his addresses to the people. Nous avons vu toutes les rues de cette ville bordées des deux côtés de morts.—Vol. i. p. 166.

were thrown together without the apparent means of any further disposal of them. Over no dead body did a poetic fancy ever imagine so direful a contention. In no scene of mortality were ever pictured feelings like these.¹

But a great effort was at length made by the government in conjunction with the neighbouring places. A military force was sent to their assistance;² and by enormous excavations beyond the walls, and the use of the void places discovered under the bastions of an ancient rampart, the streets were finally cleared.

When the evil was now abating, the first solemn act was that of penitence; and on the first of November, the day of All Saints, the bishop, accompanied by all the remaining clergy, walked in procession from his palace to celebrate mass at an altar raised in one of the public

¹ "Ὡς οἷγ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα νέκυν, ὀλίγη ἐνὶ χώρῃ,
Εἴλκεον ἀμφοτέρω.—II. p. 394.

Compared with the text, this is but common warfare.

² Vol. i. pp. 96, 101, 108, 111.

places. In this function he appeared as if he were himself the victim for the people. A cord was suspended from his neck, the cross was clasped within his arms, and his feet were uncovered.¹ It was observed too by those who attended him, that the same ceremonial had been performed at Milan by San Carlo after the plague which he had so intrepidly encountered.²

Soon after this the bishop ordered public prayers to be performed in one of the churches, where he also pronounced an affecting exhortation; and having ascended with the consecrated Host to a lofty terrace over the church, from whence he could view the city and the neighbouring country, he exorcised the pest, and gave his benediction to all the people assembled

¹ Il marche la corde au col, la croix entre les bras, et pieds nus. —Vol. i. p. 116.

² St. Charles fit autrefois la même chose dans Milan, à pareil jour de la Toussaint, lorsque cette ville eut le malheur d'être affligée de la contagion.—Ib. p. 117.

below.¹ Some fluctuations in the state of the disorder afterwards occurred, but not such as to occasion a serious alarm. It gradually subsided ; and on the 10th of December, the day on which the Journal is dated, it was so generally subdued that not a single new case was discovered in any of the hospitals.²

It was to be expected, that after the ravages of such a disease, those who had partaken in the medical treatment of it would give a more exact and scientific account of its nature and symptoms than could be obtained from any

¹ Après une très belle et très touchante exhortation, il monte le Saint Sacrement sur le terrasse qui est sur la voûte de cette église, d'où il voit à découvert toute la ville et tout le terroir, y donne la bénédiction, et fait l'exorcisme contre la peste, avec toutes les prières et les cérémonies que l'église y a prescrit.—Vol. i. p. 118.

Ce jourd'hui, 10 Décembre, la maladie a si fort calmé dans toute la ville, qu'il n'a été porté aucun nouveau malade dans aucun des hôpitaux.—Vol. i. p. 125. There were, however, single cases in the following year ; vol. i. p. 324 ; nor were the churches generally opened again till August, 1721 ; vol. i. pp. 327, 331. The plague ended in September of that year, when other places were now in a state of infection ; vol. i. pp. 201, 340. The Toulon Report says that there were some further cases at Marseilles in April, 1722.—Vol. ii. p. 360.

Journal of the daily occurrences prepared by the civil authorities of the place. Among the native physicians of Marseilles was M. Bertrand, whose observations on this malady, though brief, have been always mentioned with respect.¹ But during the disorder, several physicians arrived at Marseilles from different parts of France, especially from those into which the infection had either been carried or was expected to extend itself. Among these were some distinguished persons sent from Montpellier by the express order of His Royal Highness the Regent, viz. MM. Chicoyneau and Verny, with certain assistants.² They arrived early in August, when the disease, as has been already observed, was attaining that height at which it continued to rage till October. We hear of them still on the spot in one of the bishop's letters, dated the 20th of that month, in which the ability and exertions of M. Chicoy-

¹ Vol. i. pp. 201, 221.

² Vol. ii. p. 1.

neau and his friends are mentioned with great respect.¹ Their first Report, which had been prepared and circulated at Marseilles, was printed at Paris in January, 1721,² and exhibits an elaborate and critical description of the disease, its symptoms, and their methods of treatment. All the cases that fell under their notice, with the exception of those which were of too common a character to merit a separate statement, are divided into five classes, of which the following is a general outline:—

1. In the first class are the patients who were attacked when the disorder was in its utmost activity. The principal symptoms were shiverings, with a particular coldness of the extremities; a small irregular contracted pulse, headach, so oppressive that the patient could not hold himself up; a look betraying astonish-

¹ Vol. i. p. 176. They did not return to Montpellier till after a year's service at Marseilles and other infected places. M. Chicoyneau became first physician to the king in 1732, and published his treatise on the plague in a quarto volume in 1744.—Vol. i. p. 31.

² Vol. i. p. 177.

ment and despair ; the voice slow, interrupted, and plaintive ; the tongue generally white, but at last dry, deep-coloured, and rugged ; the face pale, cadaverous, and of a leaden colour ;¹ frequent pains at the heart, mental disquietude, a general failure of strength, absence of mind, sighing, nausea, and actual vomitings. The patients in this class died, for the most part, in a few hours. Sometimes they lasted through a day or a night, or, at the utmost, two or three days, when they sunk under the total extinction of their powers. Sometimes, though rarely, they expired in convulsions ; and, in all the cases thus far described, without the appearance of eruption, swelling, or spot on any part of the body.

2. The patients of the second class exhibited incidents of more various kinds.² They had

¹ La face pâle, plombée, éteinte, cadavereuse.—Vol i. pp. 178, 187.

² Le traitement des malades de cette deuxième classe nous a beaucoup plus occupés que les précédens, par rapport à la multi-

some of the same symptoms with those of the first ; viz. shiverings, confused look, and head-ach. But the shiverings were often followed by a brisk pulse, which however soon gave way to the smallest pressure on the artery. The warmth on the skin was only of the ordinary kind, while a burning heat was felt within, and an almost unextinguishable thirst. The tongue became white, the speech precipitate and faltering, the eyes glaring, the face red, and sometimes livid. Pains at the heart were frequent, though less violent than in the former class. Nausea and bilious vomitings came on, with looseness of bowels, of a similar discharge, while hemorrhage, even in the slightest degree, was always fatal. But the chief distinction observable in this class was, that, first or last, the patients had bubos of a very painful kind, either below, or in the groin, or the armpits, or about the neck, as well as carbuncles, chiefly in

plicité et variété des accidens, qui offraient en même tems plusieurs indications à remplir.—Vol. ii. p. 189.

the arms, legs, and thighs, and small pustules scattered over the whole body. Patients of this class rarely escaped with their lives, though they supported themselves somewhat better than the former. They died mostly with marks of gangrene and inflammation; and it is singular, that persons of the fullest and most robust habits of body had the least chance of surviving the attack.¹

3. In the cases of the third class are comprehended many of the symptoms described in both the former. But the observable circumstance is the order in which the symptoms occurred. For the most part the patients began with exhibiting those of the second class, which commonly were but the precursors of those of the first. And when these made their appearance, no hope remained.² It was further re-

¹ Ce qui paroîtra singulier, est que plus ils étoient robustes, gras, pleins, et vigoureux, moins il y avait à espérer.—Vol. i. p. 181. Compare *ib.* 207.

² La plupart des signes énoncés dans la seconde étoient ordinaire-

marked, that in a great number of these cases the early symptoms were not more alarming than those which attend common fevers of an inflammatory or putrid kind. The point of difference was the strong and unconquerable persuasion of almost every patient who finally sunk under the disorder, that his death was certain. No encouragement of the physician was of any avail ; and often the looks and expressions of the patient took this despairing turn, when nothing deserving of alarm could as yet be discovered in the pulse, the tongue, or any part of the body or its functions.

4. The fourth class comprehends the cases mentioned in the second, but with milder and more favourable appearances. These either terminated of themselves on the second or third day, or easily gave way to internal medicines ; the bubos suppurating kindly, and the patients generally recovering with very little assistance.

ment les avant-coureurs de ceux dont nous avons fait mention dans la première, et que ces derniers survenans annonçaient une mort prochaine.—Vol. i. pp. 182, 193.

5. The fifth class comprehends all those cases in which the bubos and carbuncles were attended with little or no ill effect on the spirits, or the functions of the body. The swellings rose, sometimes becoming scirrhus, and sometimes dispersing, as of their own accord. They were indeed commonly treated by the patients themselves without any interruption of their usual employments. It was only in a few cases that medical assistance became necessary. It was computed that not less than from fifteen to twenty thousand persons belonged to this class, and that, if the disorder had not taken this favourable turn, not a quarter part of the inhabitants of Marseilles would have survived.¹

To each of the classes described in this paper is subjoined the medical treatment applied to it. This, however, is not given here, as the description is altogether technical. An abridged view

¹ Si le mal n'eut pris très souvent cette tournure, il ne resterait pas dans cette ville la quatrième partie de ses habitans.—Vol. i. p. 185.

of the disease and its remedies was afterwards given by the same writers in a separate paper.¹ They represent their first description as more calculated for the experienced physician; and the second, for those young practitioners who might be called to the treatment of patients under any similar calamity. I will only add, that a comparison of both papers will sometimes lead the common reader to the better comprehension of a term or a phrase, which might have appeared obscure or ambiguous in one of them.

It is impossible to have taken even a cursory view of so interesting a subject, without some reflections on the circumstances by which it was distinguished.

1. The Plague of Marseilles was unquestionably the Plague of the Levant; but it seems to have exhibited one characteristic quality more violent and fatal than had been

¹ Vol. i. p. 186. Compare M. Bertrand's mode of treatment with these.—Vol. i. p. 201, &c.

usually observed in the disorder of that region.¹ I allude to that almost immediate and total exhaustion of strength, which prevented every attempt of nature to relieve itself by external swellings, and precluded the physician, at the same time, from expelling the evil by cleansing applications.² The incumbent malady suppresses all internal action; nor is any invigorating medicine capable of exciting the patient to a successful struggle against it. For a few hours only is the faint warmth of retreating life supported by artificial means; transpiration ceases; the superficial colour disappears; and death exhibits the body shrunk, faded, and of *leaden hue*; and, though destroyed by Plague,

¹ De toutes celles que les historiens rapportent, que les auteurs de médecine décrivent, et que nos négocians et nos gens de mer ont vu dans les différentes contrées du Levant, aucune n'a été si rapide dans ses progrès, ni si violente dans ses effets, que celle-ci.—Vol. i. p. 202.

² Les émétiques et les purgatifs leur étaient également inutiles, et souvent nuisibles, en les épuisant par des superpurgations funestes. Les cordiaux et les sudorifiques ne servaient de rien, ou tout au plus qu'à éloigner de quelques heures les derniers moments.—Vol. i. p. 179.

unmarked by swelling or spot of any kind.¹ Hence arises a conclusion of much importance to the real character of Plague; viz. that its most destructive stage is that which precedes the appearance of bubos: and that these, however terrific, offer to the patient the first chance of escape from his danger. In the history of the disease before us we see that the bubos begin only in its second class, and that, if they can but sustain themselves, they become more and more favourable in the succeeding classes, till, in the last, the principal cure is found in the ease and copiousness with which the internal venom is discharged through those channels.

2. It is equally deserving of attention, that several of the symptoms which are known to have belonged to certain pests of ancient Greece and modern Italy, are found only in the

¹ M. Bertrand confirms this. The patients who mostly died were those “qui ne poussaient rien en dehors, ou qui ne poussaient que des éruptions faibles et incapables de les dégager.”—Vol. i. p. 206.

secondary stage of the Plague of Marseilles. The internal heat, without any undue warmth on the skin, the raging thirst, and the small pustules, are recorded marks of the Plague of Athens; while the glassy lustre of the eye, the red or livid hue of the face, and the bubos of the armpits,¹ appear in the Plague of Milan in 1630. And both these species seem to have acted as principal disorders in the absence of some stronger form of Plague.

Hence arises an interesting question, to be solved only by the experienced and philosophic physician, namely, whether maladies of formidable, but only of secondary power, may not be checked and held in suspension, as it were, during the action of a stronger disease, controlling all other malignant influence, and subduing the patient to its own will? In the

¹ The prime seat of the bubos in the Plague of Marseilles is the groin or upper part of the thigh. The same is observed by Boccaccio as the predominant mark of the Plague of Florence. The mention of the arm-pits is but secondary and subsequent.

construction of the moral part of our nature, we know that any calamity more than usually distressing to our feelings, will, for a time, completely usurp the mind, and prevent it from attending to other misfortunes, which, under circumstances of less violent pressure, would have insured our serious regret.¹ May we reason from the moral to the physical composition of man? And as the human frame can present only the same materials to be acted upon by any disease that may invade it, may we suppose that the possession of it by the more potent and virulent malady, will preclude, for a time at least, the appearance of any other?

¹ Shakspeare has happily marked this feature amidst the dangers which surrounded Macbeth and occupied all his mind. Hearing the shriek of women within the castle, he asks—

“ *Macb.* ————— Wherefore was that cry?

Sey The queen, my lord, is dead.

Macb. She should have died hereafter;

There would have been a time for such a word.”

Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5.

Does not the statement just given of the Plague of Marseilles confirm us in this supposition? In the first class of it, the more violent symptoms predominate, and prevent the appearance of all others. In the second, they seem to retire, and permit the less fatal symptoms to display themselves. And in the third, there is a temporary struggle for the possession of the patient till the principal symptoms prevail over their weaker antagonists and death ensues.

In such cases the master malady is sure to exhibit its fatal supremacy. *It is the larger serpent which has swallowed up the rest, and compresses within itself the collected venom of all.* This reasoning will perhaps be farther confirmed by the statement of a very curious fact. In the month of May, 1721, when the force of the Plague was now broken, the ordinary diseases of Marseilles began to be once more observed there;¹ and we are told that their

¹ Au mois de Mai, les alarmes cessèrent; on remarqua même,

re-appearance was hailed by the inhabitants as a pledge of their returning safety.

3. The destruction of life by these scourges of our mortal condition must always be regarded with a curiosity mingled with humiliation and terror.

When the Plague had ceased, returns were demanded by the civil authorities from every part of Marseilles which had suffered, as well as from the territory immediately around it. These reported thirty thousand one hundred and thirty-nine deaths for the town, and eight thousand nine hundred and sixteen for the territory.¹ It is observed, however, by the Editor, that there is much reason to suspect the exactness of the registers kept during the confusion of the disorder, and that a nearer approach to the truth is to be found in the statement of M. Bertrand, which supposes forty thousand

comme d'un favorable augure, le retour des maladies ordinaires, qui avaient disparu pendant la peste.—Vol. ii. p. 385.

¹ Vol. ii. p. 398.

for the loss within the town, and ten thousand for that of the country. What was the population of Marseilles before the Plague does not appear to have been officially known.¹ We can only form some opinion of it from the statements given by other places to which the disorder gradually penetrated. Alarmed by the disaster of Marseilles, an enumeration was made of the inhabitants of those places before their loss began. This was done at Toulon, Aix, and Arles ; and the general estimate of the deaths was somewhat more than *one-third of the whole population* !² If we apply this rule to Marseilles, the official returns of the deaths in the town would give about ninety thousand as the whole previous number of its inhabitants. But on M. Bertrand's estimate, the number would

¹ La seule ville de Marseille, l'une des plus peuplées de la France, où l'on n'a pu savoir ce qu'on y avait perdu d'habitans, parcequ'une peste imprévue n'avait pas permis d'en faire le dénombrement, &c.—Vol. ii. p. 353.

² Of the whole population of a district in Provence, amounting to 247,899 persons, there perished 87,659.—Vol. ii. p. 387.

be one hundred and twenty thousand; and this is the more probable amount, as in the Journal itself it is incidentally observed, that when the disorder was now much advanced, and many had died and many had fled, the magistrates had still a *populace* of nearly one hundred thousand to feed and to keep in order.¹

There is unfortunately another loss of lives, which is so positively stated, and must have been so easily ascertained, from the rank and office of the parties, that we cannot hope for any mistake in the Report upon it. Of the physicians and surgeons who so zealously engaged in the treatment of this Plague, twenty-two perished, the victims of their own courageous benevolence.²

4. Before the subject is dismissed, a circum-

¹ Le 15 Août, ils écrivent à M. le Maréchal de Villars l'état et la misère extrême de la ville, y ayant une *populace* de près de cent mille personnes, sans biens, sans pain, et sans argent.—Vol. i. p. 55.

² S'ils donnèrent lieu à quelques reproches, (see p. 2,) ils y ont répondu en mourant au nombre de vingt-deux, victimes des soins donnés aux malades.—Vol. ii. p. 395.

stance connected with it may yet be noticed. According to an enumeration, by M. Bertrand, of the Plagues which had afflicted Marseilles, and are recorded in its history,¹ that which has now been described was the *twentieth*.

The first of these appears in the surrender of Massilia to Cæsar, after a long and distressful siege.² In the second, which occurred about the beginning of the sixth century, is exhibited a very ancient, perhaps the earliest, feature of the disorder now known as the Plague of the Levant. It is described as a “malady which caused the glands of the groin, and of the most delicate parts of the body, to swell to the size of walnuts.”³ This feature had not been observed in the Plague which so long afflicted the world

¹ Précis des différentes Pestes qui ont affligé Marseille.—Vol. i. p. 221.

² Massilienses, omnibus defessi malis, rei frumentariæ ad summam inopiam adducti, gravi etiam pestilentia conflictati, sese dedere sine fraude constituunt.—De Bell. Civili, lib. ii. c. 22.

³ Une maladie qui faisait sortir aux hommes des glandes de la grosseur d'une noix, aux aines, et aux parties les plus délicates. Voilà déjà un des caractères de la maladie fort ancien.—Vol. i. p. 222.

in the third century, and is described by St. Cyprian. Its symptoms, indeed, were almost those of the ancient Plague of Athens.¹ The origin of the Levant Plague would therefore seem to lie between the third and sixth century, if the disorder in the latter did not exhibit the first specimen of it.

During the same century Marseilles experienced two other Plagues. But from that time to the close of the thirteenth century, no case is recorded; and it is within the fourteenth and the early part of the eighteenth century, that we find the large and destructive remainder. Some of these were evidently connected with the Plagues which desolated considerable portions of Europe at the same time; others seem to have arisen from accidental communication with the trading nations of the Mediterranean.

A few instances, indeed, have been already

¹ Script. Eccles. Opuscula, &c.—Vol. i. pp. 265—326. Ed. M. J. Routh, 1832. Oxon.

stated, which would appear to connect France and Italy in the experience of these disorders.¹ And whoever will compare the dates of the respective Plagues, will be struck not only with their frequency, but their near coincidence in both countries.

I will only add, that sometimes it is solemnly pleasing to observe certain illustrious names which history must ever connect with these mournful events. The Great Plague which desolated Florence in the fourteenth century is immortalized by the Decameron.² In the very year, too, recorded by Boccaccio, the widespread evil acquired a more disastrous fame at Avignon;³ and its fatal memory lives in the

¹ See p. 6.

² Già erano gli' anni della fruttifera incarnazione del figliuolo di Dio al numero pervenuti di mille trecento quarantotto, quando nell' egregia città di Fiorenza pervenne la mortifera pestilenza, la quale, alquanti anni davanti nelle parti Orientali incominciata, verso l'Occidente miserabilmente s' era ampliata, &c.—Introd.

³ De Sade.

O misera ed orribil visione!

E' dunque ver' che 'nnanzi tempo spenta

Sia l' alma luce che suol far contenta

Mia vita in pene ed in speranze boni.—Petrar. Son. 212.

eternal lament of Petrarch for the loss of
Laura.¹

¹ Dormito hai, bella Donna, un breve sonno :
Or se' svegliata fra gli spirti eletti,
Ove nel suo Fattor l'alma s'interna :
E se mie rime alcuna cosa ponno,
Consecrata fra i nobili intelletti,
Fia del tuo nome quì memoria eterna.—Son. 56, vol. 2.

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