

**WHAT A PESTILENCE IS LIKE.** This generation has seen nothing like a widespread visitation of an infectious disease, such as we read of in times past; there are cities in our Southern states which have suffered at times almost to the limit from yellow fever, but this contagion it is always found possible to confine to one locality, thanks to modern methods, aided in time by the arrival of frost. By far the larger part of the country, however, is ignorant of any epidemic save the grip, or occasional outbreaks of certain children's maladies; and an impression is unconsciously prevalent that the age of serious pestilences is past, and that we are safe, without any effort to make ourselves so, from any such troubles as people have had at other times and places. And yet it is idle to deny that our country, and possibly the world at large, owing to the growing indifference to the only preventive at present known, is now directly confronted with a visitation of small-pox; it has sprung up in a hundred widely-scattered places, where it gains a foothold it remains, and no measures that any authorities have thus far taken seem to be able either to eradicate it or prevent its transmission. It is quite possible that we are just at the beginning of it, and that the country stands at the threshold of a serious battle with this disease, against which neither frost nor any climatic influence has any power.

In this state of things, De Foe's account of the pestilence which visited London in 1665 becomes of interest. This account is commonly classed as a work of fiction, yet it would be hard to find anything in literature more plausible, or with a better right to be considered as authentic. Though De Foe was only a child in that year, the events of the plague must have formed the staple of his elders' conversation for many years thereafter, and we may think what an impression they would make on a mind so painstaking, so keen for effective details, as De Foe's.

We give a few pictures:

#### The Look of the City.

The face of London was now indeed strangely altered—I mean the whole mass of buildings, city, liberties, suburbs, Westminster, Southwark, and altogether; for as to the particular part called the city, or within the walls, that was not yet much infected; but in the whole, the face of things, I say, was much altered; sorrow and sadness sat upon every face; and though some parts were not yet overwhelmed, yet all looked deeply concerned; and as we saw it apparently coming on, so every one looked on himself and his family as in the utmost danger. Were it possible to represent those times exactly to those who did not see them, and give the reader due ideas of the horror that everywhere presented itself, it must

make just impressions upon their minds, and fill them with surprise. London might well be said to be all in tears; the mourners did not go about the streets, indeed, for nobody put on black, or made a formal dress of mourning for their nearest friends: but the voice of mourning was truly heard in the streets; the shrieks of women and children at the windows and doors of their houses, where their dearest relations were perhaps dying, or just dead, were so frequent to be heard, as we passed the streets, that it was enough to pierce the stoutest heart in the world to hear them. Tears and lamentations were seen almost in every house, especially in the first part of the visitation; for towards the latter end, men's hearts were hardened, and death was so always before their eyes, that they did not so much concern themselves for the loss of their friends, expecting that themselves should be summoned the next hour.

#### The Closing of Houses.

As I went along Houndsditch one morning, about eight o'clock, there was a great noise; it is true, indeed, there was not much crowd, because people were not very free to gather together, or to stay long together, when they were there; nor did I stay long there: but the outcry was loud enough to prompt my curiosity and I called to one that had looked out of a window, and asked what was the matter.

A watchman, it seems, had been employed to keep his post at the door of a house which was infected, or said to be infected, and was shut up: he had been there all night for two nights together, as he told his story, and the day watchman had been there one day, and was now come to relieve him: all this while no noise had been heard in the house, no light had been seen; they called for nothing, sent him of no errands, which used to be the chief business of the watchmen; neither had they given him any disturbance, as he said, from the Monday afternoon, when he heard great crying and screaming in the house, which, as he supposed, was occasioned by some of the family dying just at that time: it seems the night before, the dead cart, as it was called, had been stopped there, and a servant maid had been brought down to the door dead, and the buriers, or bearers, as they were called, put her into the cart, wrapped only in a green rug, and carried her away.

The watchman had knocked at the door, it seems, when he heard that noise and crying, as above, and nobody answered a great while; but at last one looked out, and said, with an angry quick tone, and yet a kind of crying voice, or the voice of one that was crying: "What d'ye want, that ye make such a knocking?" He answered, "I am the watchman: how do you do? what is the matter?" The person an-

swered: "What is that to you? Stop the dead cart." This, it seems, was about one o'clock: soon after, as the fellow said, he stopped the dead cart, and then knocked again, but nobody answered: he continued knocking, and then the bellman called out several times—"Bring out your dead!" but nobody answered, till the man that drove the cart, being called to other houses, would stay no longer, and drove away.

The watchman knew not what to make of all this, so he let them alone till the morning-man, or day watchman, as they called him, came to relieve him, giving him an account of the particulars; they knocked at the door a great while, but nobody answered; and they observed that the window, or casement, at which the person had looked out who had answered before, continued open, being up two pairs of stairs.

Upon this, the two men, to satisfy their curiosity, got a long ladder, and one of them went up to the window, and looked into the room, where he saw a woman lying dead upon the floor in a dismal manner, having no clothes on her but her shift: but though he called aloud, and putting in his long staff, knocked hard on the floor, yet nobody stirred or answered; neither could he hear any noise in the house.

He came down again upon this, and acquainted his fellow, who went up also; and finding it just so, they resolved to acquaint either the Lord Mayor, or some other magistrate of it, but did not offer to go in at the window: the magistrate, it seems, upon the information of the two men, ordered the house to be broken open, a constable and other persons being appointed to be present, that nothing might be plundered; and accordingly it was so done, when nobody was found in the house but that young woman, who, having been infected, and past recovery, the rest had left her to die by herself, and were every one gone, having found some way to delude the watchman, and get open the door, or get out at some back door, or over the tops of the houses, so that he knew nothing of it; and as to those cries and shrieks which he heard, it was supposed they were the passionate cries of the family at the bitter parting, which, to be sure, it was to them all, this being the sister to the mistress of the family. The man of the house, his wife, several children and servants being all gone and fled, whether sick or sound, that I could never learn; nor, indeed, did I make much inquiry after it.

#### The Pits for the Dead.

I went all the first part of the time freely about the streets, though not so freely as to run myself into apparent danger, except when they dug the great pit in the churchyard of our parish of Aldgate; a terrible pit it was, and I could not resist my curiosity to go and