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The Terrible Catastrophe in Santiago.

From the Patria of Valparaiso, Dec. 16.

We write under the shadow of a distressing public calamity. On the 8th inst., a fire occurred in Santiago, the fatal results of which are without parallel in the history of the nation. Two thousand persons, for the most part females, were burned to death within an hour.

This horrifying event occurred in the church called the Compañia, from its once having belonged to the Company of Jesus, the Jesuits. The 8th inst. was the festival in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, and the evening was set apart for the climax of the ceremonial. At an early hour in the afternoon the audience began to assemble, and in such numbers that before dark persons had to return home, unable to obtain room within doors. A short time after half past seven the illuminations were lighted. The splendor of the pageant may be estimated from the fact that there were twenty thousand lights. Of these, five thousand were paraphene lamps, one of which exploded, and the calamity so universally deplored then ensued.

It is reported that the fire commenced in a transparency that represented the half moon connected with the pedestal of the Virgin; and, as the building was covered with decorations composed of tissue, gauze and painted canvass, the flames spread with inconceivable rapidity over the face of the grand altar, mounting to the very roof. During these moments the scene in the body of the church was one of panic-stricken horror that completely baffles and defies all attempts at description. In an instant the crowded assembly was overwhelmed with consternation. Those in the centre perceived the progress of the flames first, while those nearer the doors, hoping the fire would be extinguished, were unwilling to risk losing their places. The consequence was that those from the centre, rushing to the doors, came in mass upon those near the doorways while yet seated or kneeling on the floor. The latter were unable to rise in consequence, the former fell over them, the next behind fell on these, and so on, until about the doors a wall of human bodies, entangled in one another's dresses, completely chocked up every avenue of escape into the street. The paraphene lamps fell from aloft, discharging their inflammable contents on the ill-fated victims, wrapping them in an instant in flames. It is doubted if one in ten escaped; and of those who did the most part were so burned or otherwise injured that death has since ensued.

Persons in the steeet report that over the barricade of bodies within the doorways they could see individuals in the centre of the church running hither and thither amid the flames, while it was impossible to render them the slightest assistance—nay, that it was out of the question to extricate even those who were near the doors. This at a distance seems quite inexplicable; but from the energetic character of some who sought to render the sufferers aid we are sure it must have been out of the question, or it would have been done.

At the end of an hour the fury of the conflagration had passed, and then of all that immense number of persons for whom escape had been impossible, not a soul survived. The belfry had fallen, and so had much of the roof, while the walls were standing. And now imagination fails to depict the horrors of the occasion. Where just before had been gathered the *elite* of the city, the female portion of the most refined families of the land, nothing remained but lifeless bodies blackened and charred in death; some piled up in all imaginable confusion, some in rows yet kneeling, some with the heads burned off, others with limbs consumed, while the rest of the body had not suffered even a lesion. * * * The matrons and maidens, their servants and children, had perished in a common ruin.

To some houses not a soul returned. Mothers, with families of daughters, had disappeared. Husbands vainly sought from street to street and house to house their wives, brothers their sisters, and parents their children.

The first intelligence was brought here by telegraph that five hundred had perished. It was hoped this would prove to be an exaggeration; but the next day the number was six and then eight hundred, and then a thousand. It was then thought the tale of horror could not proceed further. And yet it has. Until now seventeen hundred names have been published of persons missing, and the remains of more than two thousand have been borne to the cemetery. These, in some isolated cases, have been recognized; but the overwhelming mass have been perfectly undistinguishable. For four days a crowd of laborers was at work extracting the remains; and nearly two hundred cart loads have been carried to the cemetery. Fifty men were there employed opening an immense excavation to receive them; a number that proved to be insufficient, and had to be augmented. The fire occurred on Tuesday evening; and on Saturday evening the fearful task had not been fully accomplished.

Perhaps never in any land has a calamity so dire and unmitigated, so sudden and awful, so heartrending and horrifying, been recorded.

Connected with the fire already recorded there are incidents narrated that give rise to the bitterest reflection. For instance, through the vestry of the church there was an opportunity for some to escape. By this avenue a Miss Armstrong did escape, besides another lady; but then the door was closed in order to have more room and freedom for removing articles of furniture, even to benches, candlesticks, crucifixes, &c. We give an extract from the pen of our special correspondent, dated December 11—

Yesterday we stated that the priests and servants of the church, while that multitude of females was burning, were busy in saving the miserable furniture of the vestry.

To-day we have seen images of saints, silver ornaments and paintings, in the adjoining houses that had been saved in the midst of the confusion. We have seen a large image, with its gilt framework, in the segar shop on the corner of the square; we have seen thousands of trifling objects that were got out instead of the perishing victims—inanimate stocks instead of human beings.

NATIONAL PECULIARITIES.

The health of a people must depend, in no small degree, upon the usual quality of its food, and the habits formed in consuming it. And this must be allowed to be true, even while we acknowledge the almost unlimited capacity of the human stomach to dispose of the most varied, and too often the most inappropriate articles. Not to dwell upon the peculiarities in diet which are mainly due to climatic influences—such as the enormous ingestion of fatty substances in very cold regions, demanded by the necessities of the human constitution, and the large consumption of fruits and light farinaceous articles in warm latitudes—the every day usages of the inhabitants of the temperate zones, so familiar to us, are not unworthy of a closer consideration than is commonly accorded to them, both in a hygienic and dietetic point of view.

That no standard can be set up as applicable to all, in regard to the amount of food to be taken, is undeniable. Countless circumstances combine to render this a variable quantity; but it may be safely asserted that, generally, far too much food is taken by those whose means allow them to indulge their palates and overload their stomachs. This is true on the sea, as well as on the land, as we lately had occasion to remark, when noticing the dietetics of our luxuriously-appointed steam-packets. If we were to particularize, we should say that the Englishman is more prone to exceed in taking solid food, and the Scotchman in his potations—although we can testify to an improvement, in this latter respect, in many parts of the land of "barleybree." The Irishman, when he is provident enough to get anything like abundance, is very apt to combine the faults of his fellow-islanders; and when transplanted to Scottish shores, testifies his decided preference for their whisky over that of his own land. The American has a fault which is fully as destructive to individual and to national health and vigor, as either of the others mentioned—although the results are not so immediate.

We refer to the rapidity of swallowing, so long and so unfortunately a characteristic of the inhabitants of the States. This is a trite subject, but not the less a most important one, and which it is the duty of the medical profession always to bring prominently before the people. An adjunct evil is the too great variety of supplementary articles consumed amongst us—an error observable elsewhere, it is true, but, as we think, especially noticeable in our country, and expressed often in the providing of sweetmeats and knick-knacks of various sorts, which tickle the palate, but tease the stomach. The astonishing quantity of confectionery consumed amongst us can hardly be estimated, but it is both preposterous and enormous. We have heard of young persons at school, who not only lavished all their pocket-money in the purchase of candies, cakes, &c., but even ran largely in debt for similar destructive edibles. This vicious appetite prevails to a greater extent still in hot latitudes. We have known young Cubans, and youths from our Southern States, who had nearly destroyed their health by these deplorable habits.

Virgin, in Medical Journal.

THE SPEED OF RAILROADS.

The Great Western Express to Exeter, England, travels at the rate of forty-three miles an hour, including stoppages, or fifty one miles an hour without including the stoppages. To attain this rate, a speed of sixty miles an hour is adopted midway between some of the stations, and, in certain experimental trips, seventy miles an hour have been reached. A speed of seventy miles on hour is about equivalent to thirty-five yards per second, or thirty-five yards between two beats of a common clock. All objects near the eye of a passenger traveling at this rate will pass by his eye in the thirty-fifth part of a second; and if thirty-five takes were erected at the side of the road, a yard asunder, they would not be distinguished one from another; if painted red, they would appear collectively as a continuous flash of red color. If two trains with this speed passed each other, the relative velocity would be seventy yards per second; and if one of the trains were seventy yards long, it would flash by in a single second. Supposing the locomotive which draws such a train to have driving wheels seven feet in diameter, these wheels will revolve five times in a second; the valve moves and the steam escapes ten times in a second—but as there are two cylinders, which act alternately, there are really twenty puffs or escapes of steam in a second. The locomotives can be heard to "cough" when moving slowly, the cough being occasioned by the abrupt emission of waste steam up the chimney; but twenty coughs per second cannot be separated by the air, their individuality becoming lost. Such a locomotive speed is equal to nearly one-fourth of a cannon ball; and the momentum of a whole train, moving at such a speed, would be nearly equivalent to the aggregate force of a number of cannon balls equal to one-fourth the weight of the train.

A TALK WITH THE PLANTERS.

The Meridian (Miss.) Clarion of the 16th, has the following good advice for the farmers of the Confederacy:

Now that we have fully entered into the new year, the hollidays over and the hands refreshed, and ready for the labors of 1864, we desire to say a few words to our planting friends upon the subject of the next crop. Each year the war has increased the responsibilities resting upon you. Every succeeding season has placed our cause more completely in your hands, and the defeats we sustained during the year recently closed, have served to render still more important, the duties of the producers of the country. The loss of East Tennessee, of a large portion of Mississippi, and our isolation from the Trans-Mississippi, will greatly reduce our sources of supply, while the decrease in consumers will hardly be perceptible. Without bread, meat, work animals, implements, clothing and other absolute necessaries of life, we cannot carry on the war, and it is to the producing class of our population we must now look for these articles, to supply the army and the women and children and other non-producers at home. Every farmer should, therefore, increase his plantation business, and produce as much of those articles demanded by the country as his working force will allow. Let every planter feel that to a certain extent, our success rests upon his shoulders, and being thus thoroughly alive to the country's wants, put in a crop that will excel any he ever sent to market before. Every planter, thus aroused to a full appreciation of the importance of supplies for the army—each vieing with his neighbor in quantity and quality, will then have a certainty of there being no danger of starvation in any part of the country next autumn.

During the present month there is much work to be done on the farm, and as the exigencies of the times are putting men in charge of plantations inexperienced in the business, we will venture a few hints which may be of some service to them. The land for the next crop should be cleaned off; new land cleared, manure hauled, fences put up and the plow started and kept going whenever the weather and the condition of the soil will admit. Plough deep when breaking up land. Destroy corn stalks and cotton stalks by chopping, not burning, as is frequently done. Haul your manure where it can be used as the ploughers advance with their work. Log-rolling should not be overlooked. Pile your logs up and burn them, saving the ashes to increrse the growth of your corn. Stock for the butcher, for the team and other purposes is getting very scarce, and you should give this branch of the plantation business a great deal of attention. Cattle, sheep, hogs and horses will be in great demand next summer, and as we are cut off from Texas and East Tennessee we must endeavor to raise enough among ourselves. Give this matter your personal supervision; see that the live stock have proper attention, particularly in wet weather, and are supplied with food at regular hours.

OUR DUTY.

What is the duty of every man in this Southern confederacy? It is not to find fault with and pick flaws in the Government—it is not to labor to incense the pehple against their rulers—it is not to throw obstacles in the way of achieving our Liberty—it is not to prolong the war by our acts—but it is our duty to pitch in and help to conquer a peace that recognizes our right to govern ourselves; if it be not convenient for us to shoulder the musket, then it is our duty to aid and assist in the prosecution of the war to the extent of our ability, by all other means. We must be a united and not a divided people. We are in the war now, and the only honorable alternative left us is to fight it out, cost what it may. It is too late now to say the job is a bigger one than we expected, or that it is costlier than we dreamed of, and ergo we had best give up. That wont do! If we give up we cover ourselves with lasting shame and infamy, and bequeath to posterity disgrace and the iron chains of slavery.

We did not advocate this war; we oppofed secession to the bitter end, because we believed with Shakspear, that we had "better bear the ills we had, than fly to others we knew not of." We thought we saw in secession civil war, and a land