

THE WIDE AWAKE

JUNE, 1887.

IN THE LINE OF THE EARTHQUAKE.

(Mentone, France, Feb. 23, 1887.)

Grace Dennis Littlefield.

IT had been the quietest night possible. Not a breath of air stirred among the gray-green olives of the hills. The Mediterranean lay like a steel-blue mirror spread out for the stars to look down on. All the world was still asleep, dreaming, if at all, of that gay Carnival-time which had but just ended, and whose fantastic, unreasoning mirth-making might well pursue one into the droll land of dreams, when suddenly through the dusky stillness of the early morning there came a sound like the booming of a distant battlefield, or the breaking of an angry surf upon a long line of shore, accompanied by a trembling and jarring and rumbling of the whole earth, as when a mighty train thunders past some tiny wayside station. And then all in a moment, before I had time to question what it meant, our house began to rock violently to and fro, as if some great monster of the world below had seized upon it in his hand and was shaking it as a terrier shakes a rat. I sprang up in bed in horror, almost suffocated by the plaster dust in the air, while the roar of the earthquake was drowned in the noise of shivering china and falling furniture, of straining, breaking timbers, and of tottering partitions that groaned like human things in agony as the walls were wrenched asunder. It was like looking on at what one imagines the end of the world might be — a sudden awful instant of unheralded and overwhelming destruction.

The first shock, from beginning to end, lasted less than fifty seconds, when all was still again; but in a few moments more, before I could free myself from the entanglement of bent rods and fallen curtains and masses of solid plaster (which, but for those same iron rods, bent over me like protecting arms, would indubitably have killed me on the spot), there came a second shock, shorter and far less severe than the first, but alarming

enough even so, as we stood with the hanging walls and loose boards shaking and rattling around us like the flapping sails and creaking cordage of a ship in the midst of a gale.

Fortunately our stairway was still standing, for one's best chance of safety at such a time lies in escaping between the shocks to some open space out of reach of the falling buildings; and seizing whatever lay nearest to hand, we rushed down and out to a public garden, where we found a crowd of panic-stricken fugitives like ourselves, in every variety of scanty costumes, roughly cloaked in rugs and blankets snatched up in mad haste as they fled, and all with faces unforgettable white and ghastly and full of that nameless dread of those who have looked Death close in the face and have caught glimpses of things unutterable.

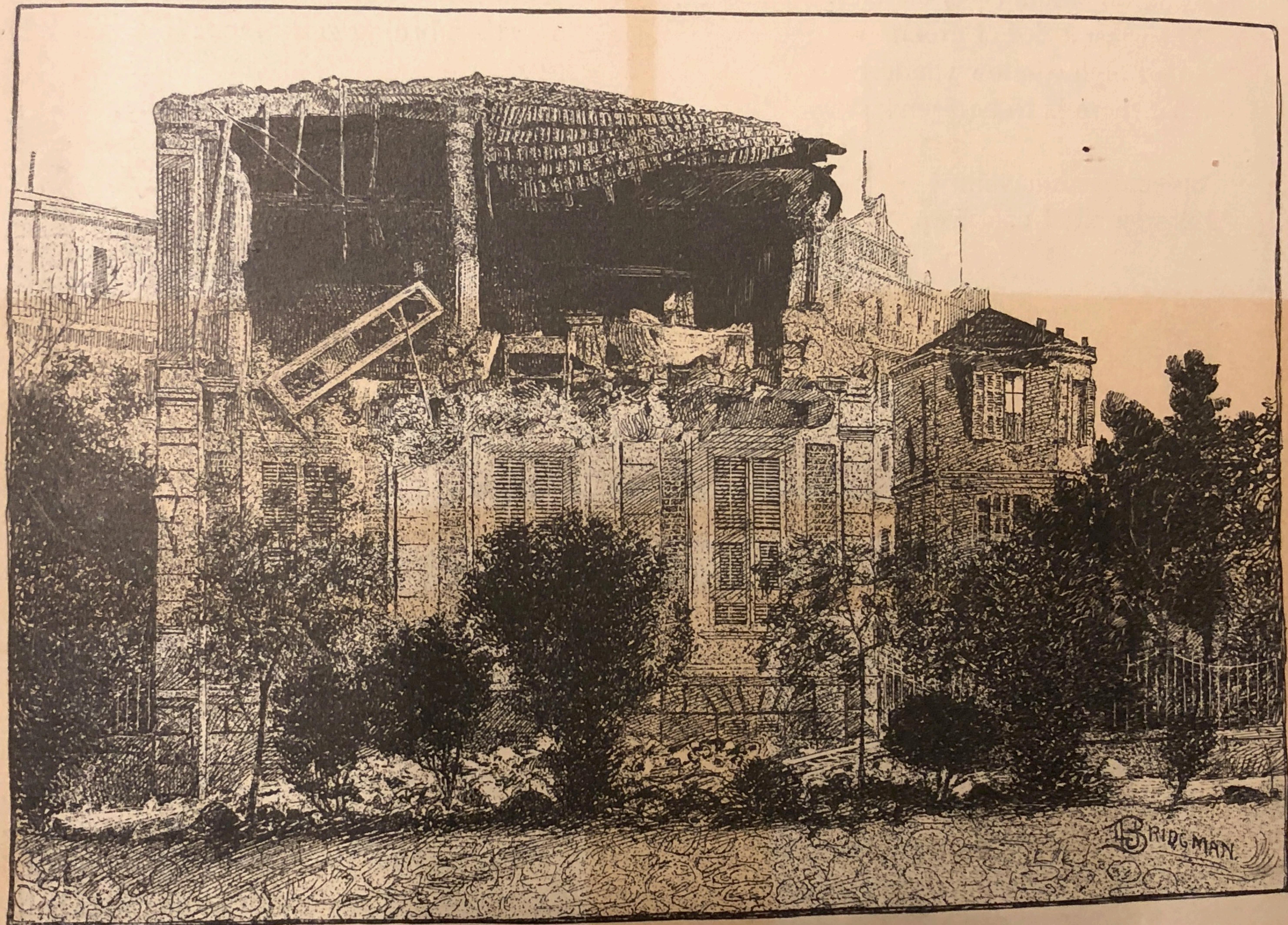
At first we sat or stood about in groups, awed into utter speechlessness. All sorts of odd things happened, but at the time nothing struck us as either ludicrous or surprising. One invalid, who had not walked for years, under the fright of the earthquake ran in her nightdress and bare feet from her hotel to our garden, which was some squares away, and the same curious unaccountable recovery of lost powers was reported of several paralytics who were instantaneously cured by the shock. By degrees however, as all continued quiet, confidence returned; the more venturesome made daring raids back into the houses to save what they could from the general wreckage; tongues were loosened, and strangers and friends talked indiscriminately, exchanging their various experiences and retailing many hairbreadth escapes as miraculous as my own; and some broke down completely and sobbed hysterically, and others tried to laugh and make a joke of it, not realizing that their jesting seemed as out of place as merriment in a graveyard, while a child and a little dog

with alert brown ears and bright eyes gleaming with frolic — the only two uncomprehending happy beings among us all — struck up an intimate friendship, and made sport with each other in and out between the frightened people, and played bo-peep over the heaps of reserved household belongings flung in motley piles upon the gravel, and were hungry and ate biscuits with undisturbed, every-day appetites.

So time wore by in wretched suspense, till three hours later a third shock came, which paralyzed laughter and sobs alike on the instant, and drove back the blood from every face, and many rushed screaming into each other's arms and frantically

of all the dread sensations of an earthquake, the worst is the feeling of indescribable horror which possesses one from head to foot, and which is neither excitement nor despair nor alarm, nor like anything one has ever known before. Only those who have felt it can comprehend it; it is the experience of a lifetime, bought in one single awful unearthly moment.

That third shock was the last of any severity, but lesser ones continued at intervals all the day and night following, and indeed for long thereafter. Scarcely anybody was brave enough when night came to venture again indoors. Some of our friends slept in the open gardens on benches or



A MENTONE VILLA AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE. (*From a photograph.*)

embraced, thinking to die together. It was horrible to look up through the clear bright sunlight and see the houses swaying and staggering like drunken things, and hear the deep, hoarse, sullen, subterranean growl, and the sound of crashing and rending and breaking on every side, followed by such a cry sent up from a whole cityful of terrified people as surely one never hears but once. And then came silence again, a silence almost worse than any sound, for in it one heard one's own heart beat and felt fear turning to ice in one's veins. For

on mattresses spread upon the trembling ground; some slept in tents; some in the tiny bathing houses along the beach, and some, like gypsies, camped out in their own carriages. We were offered shelter by a friend whose villa, being at the east end of the town, was one of the few that had escaped injury, and there we all slept in the drawing-rooms on the ground floor, dressed and ready to rush into the garden at the first threatening of danger.

Our drive through the town to reach this villa,

was like passing through some city of the dead. The deserted streets were blocked with débris from the mutilated, desolate, uninhabited and uninhabitable houses. Here a wall was cracked open from top to bottom; here cracked and seamed and blistered all over like a plate exposed to too great heat; here the whole front of a house had fallen out, and there a tower had come crashing down to the ground. Not a roof but had lost tiles and chimneys at least. Balustrades and balconies had given way on all sides. Windows were set awry. Shutters and doors hung flapping on broken hinges like helpless signals of distress. Great stones were twisted completely around as if they had spun like tops in their places, and plaster lay ash-like over everything, leaving great unsightly scar-like spots to mark from where it fell. It seemed an almost incredible transformation of the place. One felt as if the years had suddenly slipped back into the by-gone ages, and as if one were part and parcel oneself of some as yet unhistoried Herculaneum or Pompeii.

Thousands and thousands of people fled Northward that morning from all along the Riviera,

many of them leaving bag and baggage behind them, for it is marvellous how quickly even one's dearest possessions lose all value the moment life is in peril. It is now six weeks since that terrible twenty-third of February, eighteen hundred and eighty-seven. Even the most timid and most unnerved have regained their courage and their lost spirits. Those whose houses were spared returned long since even into the upper storeys. The shops are reopened, and masons and bricklayers and carpenters are everywhere at work, repairing where repair is possible, and cheerily rebuilding where they must. The sentinels who forbade entrance at doors of condemned houses, and the soldiers who stood guard over streets unsafe for public traffic, have withdrawn their prohibitions and disappeared. Mentone will soon again wear its bright and smiling face of old. Yet while we live, none of us who were in the line of the earthquake, can ever forget that dim grey Ash Wednesday morning when we awoke so suddenly out of our Carnival dreams to find ourselves in sackcloth and ashes indeed, and with the *Miserere* stifled upon our lips.

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TWEEDLEDEE AND TWEEDLEDUM.

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.

"DON'T you see, Aunt Priscilla? Don't you see?"

Aunt Priscilla pursed up her thin old lips and bent more closely to her knitting, her soft white curls drooping over her face, as if to soften the severity of an expression too new to her gentle features to sit comfortably upon them.

"What I do see," she replied at last, slowly, and with that distinctness with which all distasteful words are uttered, however kindlier phrases may be slurred over in the saying—"what I do see, John, and plainly enough, is that there is a great difference between Tweedledee and Tweedledum."

Mr. Maxwell paused in his heavy, middle-aged walk up and down the drawing-room, and confronted the old lady with a look of extreme surprise.

"Dear me, Aunt Priscilla, how old you are getting, to be sure!" he said, looking

concernedly at her forehead, with a sudden suspicion that all was not quite right behind; and contentedly abandoning her remark as a hopeless riddle, he walked back to his wife, and threw himself in a corner of the sofa near which she sat. "I never admired Durant, for all he's my brother-in-law," he went on, jingling the small silver in his pockets with that ugly habit common to so many men that it should almost be included among the classified attributes of the human male. "And I must say I think the way he is pitching—yes, absolutely pitching, that poor little white-faced Jennie of his at the young fellow's head is outrageous. It's odious. It's despicable. It's unworthy of any father, or any girl. It makes me sick to see it. He's had young Parsons there to dinner twice in the last three weeks, hasn't he, Maria?"

"Three times, dear," corrected Mrs. Maxwell. "I know it was three times, because each night that Mr. Parsons dined with us he spoke of being there only