

OBITUARY.

RALPH KEELER.

It seems impossible longer to resist the conclusion that the waters of the Gulf have closed over a young and gifted man of letters who represented THE TRIBUNE during the last few weeks at Santiago de Cuba. Ralph Keeler had probably not an equal in the world, and the news of his death will excite a pang of genuine sorrow wherever he was known. He was a man of such sunny and cheerful nature, such perfect health and active frame, such bright and hopeful views of life, that the thought of a timely death seems incongruous with him. He led a life of independent and unconventional wandering, but carried through it all an unobtrusive character and a youthful simplicity of manner unusual in men of his experience. He had a strong natural literary capacity, cultivated by reading and study, which already gave promise of a brilliant career. But his friends can only hope that somewhere else those bright and energetic qualities will find a more fitting opportunity of development. His life was short but unstained by any vices, and filled with honest work and kindly deeds done in his own independent way.

Ralph Keeler was the son of an Ohio farmer of the same name, and grandson of Colman J. Keeler, who was Major of a militia regiment in the war of 1812, and one of the earliest settlers in Toledo, Ohio, having built the first brick house in that city. His birthplace was a farm-house, a few miles from Toledo, what is now the village of Weston. He was born August, 1840. His parents died in his boyhood, and he was left in charge of guardians. He inherited property, but it would appear that he never derived much advantage from it; he says in his "Vagabond Adventures" that it was so thoroughly alienated during his minority that he never after the trouble even of collecting rents.

At the age of eight he was sent to Buffalo to be educated. Here he remained two or three years attending a public school, when, disliking his position in the family of the uncle with whom he lived, he made a vow that he would have nothing more to do with any of his relatives, and ran away. He lingered about the wharves until he prevailed on the steward of a steamer called the Diamond to take him on board as pantry boy. He had various interesting adventures during the two voyages that were made on this vessel; but having on the third voyage the luck to incur the displeasure of the captain, he was put ashore at Conneaut, Ohio. Here he was taken in charge by the steward's wife, and was living comfortably when he heard the "appalling piece of news" that his whereabouts were known, and that he would be sent for soon. He promptly slipped himself away on the Diamond, returned to Buffalo, where he "shipped" as cabin boy at "the market salary of \$10 a month." Being unpaid at the end of the first month, he left, and, after a sojourn in Detroit, returned to Buffalo, where he was kindly treated by a schoolmate, and a place was procured for him by his friend's father on the steamer North Indiana. All this happened before the lad had completed his twelfth year. His juvenile whims next led him to organize a band of minstrels, but this enterprise failed, and he became a train boy on the Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana Railroad, enjoying a monopoly of selling newspapers and lemonade to the passengers. Toward the middle of the Summer while he was thus engaged the cholera became so prevalent in the Western cities that he deemed it prudent to retire from this business and live quietly on his earnings. He settled himself, therefore, at a fashionable boarding-house in Toledo. His skill at dancing and general smartness now led to his being engaged with the "Booker Troupe," also known as the "Metropolitan Serenaders," a company of strolling players then giving performances in the Western cities. His new life was full of adventure; he was the "juvenile prodigy" of the troupe, and was known to the public under the assumed name of Juba. The company, he says, wandered all over the Western country, traveling at all hours of night and day and in all kinds of conveyances from the best to the worst. In course of time the "Booker Troupe" was disbanded, and Ralph was "thrown out of an engagement." He traveled subsequently in two other companies, then repaired to Cincinnati and joined "The Mitchell's," another famous Western band of itinerant players, which he left to perform on the Floating Palace, a great boat built expressly for show purposes, which visited towns on the Western and Southern rivers. The days and nights on the Floating Palace, he says, were eventful ones. Some unexpected thing was always happening to the boats, to the performers or to the audiences. Among these adventures was the following, the account of which is a good specimen of his easy, humorous style of narrative. We quote from his "Vagabond Adventures," an autobiographical work published in London in 1870:

Shortly after, at another little town in Kentucky, an away couple came into the museum, bringing the "agony" stuffed hyena and a hilarious alligator, also stuffed, and changed perpetual smiles at each other—which of course were intended by the taxidermist as looks of ferocity—and while a barrel organ was playing dance for the party, this runaway couple were married. A brother-in-law of the lady arrived on the scene just too late to prevent the nuptials. The only means of revenge he could think of was to get abominably drunk and raise a disturbance in the concert-room that afternoon. It must have been a memorable day with that particular family, for the young gentleman was soundly whipped for his share in the wedding ceremonies.

The row, however, became general. That was the memorable occasion when a "Governor" Dorr, entering the arena by a side door, announced with some emphasis that he wanted it understood he had something to say in the fight. He was standing on a seat by the door when he commenced this speech. It was never ended, at least to his satisfaction. He had just begun his exordium as reported when some stalwart Kentuckian knocked him clear through the door. With remarkable presence of mind the "Governor" picked up his hat as it had merely happened to drop it on the guard of the door and walked quietly off to his stateroom, leaving the regular ushers to restore order.

If I have not before mentioned Dorr's presence on the Floating Palace, it has been because I have been trying to explain in my puzzled memory how he came there, and what was the line of his duties. I should have put him down at once as the literary gentleman of the establishment were it not for the fact that we had another who manifestly filled that office.

I allude to the gentleman who edited the daily paper which was printed in the museum and distributed gratuitously to its patrons. This man was the founder and for a long time the editor of one of the best known and most influential journals now published in the United States. The wreck of a fine scholar and a graphic writer who had been the associate of some of the highest and best of our land, it was a melancholy sight to see him industriously printing his little paper before the stolid, curious people who thronged about his stand.

He further says of his journey at this time:

We saw, indeed, a great deal of wild life in the country we visited, for we steamed thousands of miles on the Western and Southern rivers. We went, for instance, the entire navigable length of the Cumberland and Tennessee. Our advertising agent had a little boat of his own, in which he preceded us. The Palace and Raymond (the tug-boat) would sometimes run their noses upon the banks of some of these rivers, where there was not a habitation in view, and by the hour of the exhibition the boats and shore would be thronged with people. In some places on the Mississippi, especially in Arkansas, men would come in with pistols sticking out of their coat pockets, or with long bowie-knives protruding from the legs of their boots.

His autobiographical book abounds in reference to his stage companions, some of whom are still well known to the public, while others are forgotten.

Going up the Mississippi from Cairo, he says the Floating Palace passed, one Sunday, the old French town of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and its Roman Catholic college on the river bank. The boys were out on the lawn, under the trees, and he became, he says, as envious of their lot as he ever had been before of a man who worked on a steamboat or who danced "in the minstrels." He suddenly resolved that he would go to that college. He was, however, unable to leave his troupe until after a visit to Galveston, where he played three weeks. Returning then to New-Orleans, he took passage for Cairo, whence, owing to the river being frozen, he went to Cape Girardeau by land. This journey was so expensive that he had but \$35 left when he reached there. The good President, Father J. V. Ryan, since made Roman Catholic Bishop of Buffalo, did not turn him away, and there he spent 16 happy months after which he went to Toledo and secured a situation in the Post-Office. He had been there but a few months, when the idea of going to Europe seized him, and he started with \$181 in his pocket. He went from Toledo to New-York as a cattle-drover, bought a steerage ticket to London, and reached the English capital during the World's Fair in 1863. He went thence to Paris, and almost immediately left that city for Heidelberg, as his capital of \$30 would

not admit of a longer sojourn in Paris. Here he became a student of the famous Karl Rupert University, and while there made pedestrian tours through Italy, the Tyrol, Switzerland, Belgium, and France, always in the dress of the Handwerksburschen. When he got back to Heidelberg, at Christmas, he had reached the end of his \$181. He had written to innumerable American newspapers, but heard nothing at all until that Christmas, when he received \$25 from an American paper to which, he says, he had written 20 letters of news and 25 of duns. A subsequent letter containing \$50 made Heidelberg too small to hold him, and he started down the Rhine. He went through Belgium and Holland, and a few months later occupied an obscure garret in the Quartier Latin in Paris. In that city he met George Alfred Townsend, who suggested to him to write for some English magazine, his cash capital then consisting of 25 francs and four sous. He wrote and his article was accepted, and he went to Florence, where he lived all Winter on the proceeds. He then sent another article, which was respectfully declined, but he sent the rejected manuscript to a less pretentious periodical in Edinburgh and started for Leghorn, where he found an American captain, who consented to take him home and let him owe him \$50. Luckily enough, when he reached Boston, without a cent in his pocket, he found a letter which had been forwarded containing a draft on London for the almost forgotten article which he had sent to Edinburgh in sheer desperation. This enabled him to pay for his passage and reach Toledo, his starting place, after an absence of a little over two years, and at an expense of a little over \$300. Keeler was then 22 years of age. Soon after his return he sailed for San Francisco, where he remained two years, engaged in teaching foreigners English, and writing for *The Alta California*, *The Golden Era*, and *The Californian*, and also delivered lectures. He afterward came East, to act as correspondent of *The Alta California*. In the early part of 1849 he sent to *The Atlantic Monthly* his sketch entitled "Three Years a Negro Minstrel." This was published in July, and six months later he sent "A Tour of Europe for \$181," and received for the article more than half as much as the whole trip cost him. This was printed in July, and soon after he received a position on the staff of that magazine. During the rest of the year he wrote reviews for *The Atlantic* and revised proof-sheets. In January, 1870, *Every Saturday* became an illustrated periodical, and Mr. Keeler started on a tour in search of the picture-que on the Mississippi. He was accompanied by Mr. A. R. Waud, and was remarkably successful. The first article of the series appeared in the issue for May 20, and the succeeding ones were published almost consecutively until Nov. 25, when every principal city on the Mississippi had been described. He also wrote brilliant articles describing the Chicago fire. When *Every Saturday* ceased to be an illustrated paper Mr. Keeler's services could no longer be made available, and he went again to Europe. He resided five months at Geneva, partly engaged in reporting the proceedings of the High Court of Arbitration, and devoted the remainder of a year to travel. On his return he wrote again for *The Atlantic Monthly*, and engaged in general literary work. While in California, Mr. Keeler wrote a novel, "Gloverson and his Silent Partner," and more recently translated George Sand's "Marquis de Villimer." He had notes prepared for another original work, which would doubtless have excelled any of his previous literary productions.

Last Summer Mr. Keeler was correspondent of this Journal at Kelly's Island, a fashionable Western Summer resort in Lake Erie, and when recently there seemed a likelihood of war with Spain, he was engaged again by THE TUNNE as special correspondent in Cuba. He proceeded, Nov. 25, from this city to Havana, and thence to Santiago de Cuba. He left the latter city about the 15th of December on the steamer for Batabanó, whence he intended to proceed to Havana. He was missed at Manzanillo, where the steamer called, but his baggage was still on board. His disappearance gave rise to fears that he was drowned, which later advices prove unhappily to have been fully warranted. He leaves two sisters and one brother, beside numerous other friends to mourn deeply his untimely death.

A Paris telegram of yesterday mentions the death of Jean Antoine Galignani, senior editor of *Galignani's Messenger*, a Journal printed in English at the French capital, and made up entirely of extracts from French and English papers, avoiding all editorial comment on its own part. Mr. Galignani and his brother conducted that paper since 1821, it having been founded in 1811 by their father, an Italian.